THE ® # saint MYSTERY MAGAZINE

APRIL
35c

ICD

Edited by LESLIE CHARTERIS

The Death Ring of Sneferu
by Sax Rohmer

Drop of Green Fire
by Stuart Palmer

Momentous Blemish
by E. Phillips Oppenheim

City in the Bottle
by Hayden Howard

The Brass Buddha
by Leslie Charteris

RAFFLES AND SHIPMATE SADIE
A NEW STORY by BARRY PEROWNE

SOME OLD, SOME NEW — THE FINEST IN MYSTERY FICTION

A KING-SIZE PUBLICATION

ONE OF THE incidental occupational hazards of a writer's life, which he shares in a smaller but similar way with that of an actor, is that many ingenuous admirers are prone to believe that he himself is a close kin to the type of character he portrays. This may be painless and even pleasant if he happens to be a John Wayne of the pen, but can be embarrassing if he chances to be an Alec Guinness.

Writers of mystery and adventure are especially vulnerable to this kind of projection. Few situations could be more alarming, frankly, to the average author of detective stories, accustomed to describing in dextrous and entertaining style the probings and deductions of his idealized sleuth, than to be asked to solve a real-life problem to which he does not privately have the answer in advance. Still more precarious is the position of the writer of a certain modern school. It may be flattering to his ego if he can get himself regarded as a mammoth of virility accustomed to trampling through swarms of delightedly swooning dolls with the same aplomb as his neanderthal hero; but it can be disconcerting if he also becomes reputed to subsist, like the same hero, mainly on a diet of cut-rate rye, and to be chronically behind with the rent.

We feel that a warning note on this subject is called for by our publication this month of CITY IN THE BOTTLE. Although the leading man in this brand-new novelet is introduced as a drunk, and is not more than half sober for much of the story, this condition has no relation to that of the author, Hayden Howard. We do not often publish stories which even feature such a situation; but this one has a more legitimate reason than most, as you will discover.

Barry Perowne, whose newest RAFFLES AND SHIPMATE SADIE is our other big feature, is not really exposed to the same risk: Raffles, of course, was not his original character, though he has done a classic job of adapting himself to Hornung's creation. And nobody has ever suspected Stuart Palmer of being a secret Hildegarde Withers, as she appears in DROP OF GREEN FIRE. But E. Phillips Oppenheim, during the lifetime which produced THE MOMENTOUS BLEMISH, often suffered from being taken for a personal authority on crime and intrigue; and Sax Rohmer still gets accused of dabbling in such spooky matters as THE DEATH RING OF SNEFERU.

At least my current contribution should not make anyone think I am a Buddhist.

Leslie Charteris

WHAT SECRET POWER DID THIS MAN POSSESS?

FRANCIS BACON (A Rosicrucian)

WHY was this man great? How does anyone—man or woman—achieve greatness? Is it not by mastery of the powers within ourselves?

Know the mysterious world within you! Attune yourself to the wisdom of the ages! Grasp the inner power of your mind! Learn the secrets of a full and peaceful life! Francis Bacon—world famous English philosopher, scientist—like many other learned and great men and women—was a Rosicrucian. The Rosicrucians (NOT a religious organization) includes in its membership—people from every walk of life—from every race and creed. Today, headquarters of the Rosicrucians send over seven million pieces of mail annually to all parts of the world.

THIS BOOK FREE!

Write for YOUR FREE COPY of "The Mastery of Life"—TODAY. No obligation. A non-profit organization. Address: Scribe C.A.W.

The **ROSICRUCIANS** (AMORC) SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA

SEND THIS COUPON

Scribe C.A.W.
The ROSICRUCIANS (AMORC), San Jose, California

Please send me the *free* book, *The Mastery of Life,* which explains how I may learn to use my faculties and powers of mind.

NAME_____

ADDRESS_____

CITY_____ ZONE_____ STATE_____

THE ® saint MYSTERY MAGAZINE

APRIL 1959
VOL. 11, NO. 4

Raffles and Shipmate Sadie 4
by BARRY PEROWNE

The Brass Buddha 22
by LESLIE CHARTERIS

The Death Ring of Sneferu 34
by SAX ROHMER

Drop of Green Fire 49
by STUART PALMER

Run, Pedro, Run! 65
by JOSEPH F. CALLAHAN

Momentous Blemish 69
by E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM

The Saint's Ratings 83
A MONTHLY FEATURE

City in the Bottle 84
by HAYDEN HOWARD

What's New in Crime 113
by HANS STEFAN SANTESSON

Charles, Nicknamed Stinky 116
by POLLY S. MacMANUS

H. L. Herbert
Publisher

Hans Stefan Santesson
Editorial Director

Leslie Charteris
Supervising Editor

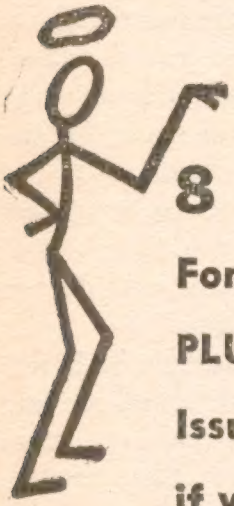
THE SAINT MYSTERY MAGAZINE, Vol. 11, No. 4. Published monthly by KING-SIZE PUBLICATIONS, INC., 320 Fifth Ave., New York 1, N. Y. Subscription, 12 issues $3.75, single copies 35¢. Foreign postage extra. Reentered as second-class matter at the post office, N. Y., N. Y. Characters in this magazine are entirely fictitious, and have no relation to any persons living or dead. © 1959, by KING-SIZE PUBLICATIONS, INC. All rights reserved. April, 1959.

PRINTED IN U. S. A.

SPECIAL OPPORTUNITY for NEW subscribers

FIND MORE
Mystery-Fiction
By MORE
Great Writers
In This

MONEY-SAVING OFFER



8 Issues
For Only $2
PLUS An Extra
Issue FREE
if you remit
as below NOW

Here's an exciting invitation to bring into your home **the world's greatest mystery and detective story authors!** You can now have The Saint Mystery Magazine delivered to you each month at a special low rate that saves you **almost 1/3** of the price you would pay at the newsstand.

As a mystery reader, you get the most thrilling collection of mystery-detective fiction ever made available IN A SINGLE MAGAZINE! Spine-tingling stories by master plotters such as G. K. Chesterton, Sax Rohmer, E. Phillips Oppenheim, Edgar Wallace, Carter Dickson, Philip Wylie, Van Wyck Mason, and Octavus Roy Cohen! You'll enjoy dramatic plots that will grip your imagination and give you MORE reading pleasure.

SAVE MONEY!

TOP MYSTERIES COMING UP!

In each issue of The Saint, you meet internationally famous writers whose published novels would cost you from $2.75 to $3.95 each. You now have the chance to enjoy their writings in The Saint Mystery Magazine! This special offer brings you the next 8 issues for just $2! Or, better still, send $2 now and receive an extra copy FREE.

You can look forward to a complete mystery each month by Leslie Charteris—creator of The Saint, one of the most popular characters in fiction today—PLUS exciting stories by authors such as we've mentioned.

TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THIS MONEY-SAVING OPPORTUNITY by mailing the coupon below NOW. This exceptional offer assures you of receiving—at low cost—the finest in mystery-detective fiction . . . the kind you don't want to miss!

MAIL THIS COUPON TODAY

KING-SIZE PUBLICATIONS, Inc. SM 94
320 Fifth Avenue, New York 1, New York

Yes! I want to receive The Saint Mystery Magazine at your special money-saving rates! Please enter my subscription as checked below:

___ **8 issues of The Saint for just $2. Please bill me.**

___ **Enclosed is $2. Send me 9 issues of The Saint. (A saving of 36% of the regular newsstand price.)**

Name_____

Address_____

City_____ Zone___ State_____

raffles and shipmate sadie

by . . . Barry Perowne

The windfall meant only one thing to her. She'd be able to "buy back" her brother—before it'd be too late . . .

THE winter evening had set in wet and blustering when A. J. Raffles and myself, Bunny Manders, raised our caps to the quarter-deck of H. M. S. *Stingray* and descended the gangway to the wharf. Veils of rain swept the whitecapped waters. We drew our capes more closely about us, and bent our heads to the downpour, as we accompanied our host out through the dockyard gates and made for the nearby R. N. Barracks.

"After two years on the China Station," Raffles remarked, "this weather must be a bit of a change for you, Braithwaite."

Our host only laughed. It was a Saturday and Raffles had brought down a racquets team from London to this famous Naval town. I had come along for the trip. After the matches this afternoon, our team had been borne off in ones and twos by our opponents to visit their various ships. Braithwaite, a young lieutenant - commander who as No. 1 for the Navy side had been matched against Raffles, had invited the pair of us aboard his gunboat.

Back in the mid-thirties, a young writer named Barry Perowne took on an unusual assignment—to revive E. W. Hornung's Raffles, that "dean of delightful thieves" (to again quote Leslie Charteris). Here is the latest episode in the Raffles saga, by now longer than Hornung ever planned it.

Copyright 1958 by Barry Perowne.

Our own service experience, such as it was, had been in the militia. We were perfectly ignorant of Naval life and customs, so had jumped at the chance of going aboard the *Stingray,* especially as this small ship had been in the news recently by reason of an action against Yellow Sea pirates. Braithwaite had cleaned out a roost of these gentry and liberated a number of slaves and captives, among them an elderly mandarin of wealth and consequence, who thus had been saved from having to stump up a considerable ransom.

Naturally, Raffles and I had hoped to hear Braithwaite's own story of this colorful affair, but the Navy seemed to have no great sense of proportion, and all we had been able to get out of him was an inquest on the afternoon's racquets. Meantime, his steward chap had proffered us trays of glasses with extraordinary frequency and if, with a smile and a headshake, we had indicated the filled glasses already in our hands, had murmured implacably, "Captain's orders, sir."

In consequence of this hospitable custom, my head seemed to be floating a bit as we approached the R. N. Barracks. Some way up the street, the wanly flickering gaslights under a theater marquee showed the first house audience shuffling inside. We ourselves turned in past the sentries at the Barrack gates, set in a high, spike-topped wall. We crossed a rainswept barrack square and were ushered by Braithwaite into a lofty hall with massive chandeliers, a handsome staircase, many time-darkened portraits of great admirals on the walls.

"We'd better not stop, Braithwaite," Raffles said. "As we're all so decently invited here for dinner and your smoking concert, we'd better just collect the rest of our fellows, now, and get along to the billets to change."

"Excuse me, sir," a man who had come forward said to Braithwaite. "The other visitors have been in already and they left word to tell Mr. Raffles that they'd gone on to the billets."

"Thanks, steward," said Braithwaite. He grinned at us. "You must have one drink before you go. I insist."

There was nothing I needed less than another drink, but there was nothing for it but to yield up my outdoor things and accompany Raffles and Braithwaite into a vast room where a great fire roared, more Naval portraits hung on the walls, and on a colossal sideboard was set out a truly remarkable display of silver.

"Is that right, Braithwaite," called one of a number of officers lounging in leather chairs, "that the great Crichton Hook is

to do his turn at the smoker tonight?"

"I believe so," Braithwaite said. "I hear he was invited because this is his home town. He comes of an old Naval family. He's coming on here after the second house at the theater. Have you seen him? Is he any good?"

"Not a bad ventriloquial turn," said the other officer. "I saw it at the theater last Tuesday."

Raffles, with a drink in his hand, had strolled over to admire the array of silver. "Tell us, Braithwaite," he said. "The token of gratitude we read about, which your old mandarin made to the *Stingray*—is that one of the trophies among your Wardroom plate here?"

"Temporarily, anyway," said Braithwaite. "It's that gold salver thing with the engraved Chinese inscription—rather flowery and of course much too kind—and the dragon device studded in in rubies. Bit gaudy, isn't it? But he meant well. Decent old buffer with long, thin moustaches, his hands in the sleeves of his robe, and an octagonal hat with a mandarin's button on top. Nice old fellow. Come on, let's have another drink."

Clearly, it made him uncomfortable to talk about the exploits of his ship. But the *Stingray* salver, with its romantic background, had taken hold of my imagination, stimulated as it was by Navy gin, and I still was thinking of the beautiful object as Raffles and I walked out presently past the sentries at the gates and bent our heads to the wind and rain.

"From the Yellow Sea," I said, "to this Naval barracks on a wet Saturday night. What a change of scene for the *Stingray* salver, Raffles!"

But he had spotted a cab ahead, dropping some latecomer outside the theater. "Come on, let's see if we can grab that four-wheeler," he said.

He hailed it as we broke into a double. Rain was deluging down in sheets from the theater marquee. From inside the theater sounded a hubbub of claps, catcalls and piercing whistles. I wondered which turn was earning this lively demonstration, and I glanced at the rain-sodden bills topped with the name: The Great CRICHTON HOOK, Ventriloquist—Fresh From European Triumphs.

Raffles took my arm, urging me into the cab. "Canoe Club annexe," he called to the cabbie, who was wearing a tarred sack that looked like a pixie-cap over his bowler. Raffles ducked in after me. "What a night, Bunny!"

The Canoe Club, where our R. N. hosts had arranged excellent billets for our racquets team, was some way across the town. What with my recent potations,

the darkness inside the cab, the soothing clip-clop and jingle of the horse, the monotonous drumming of the rain on the roof, my chin soon sank on my chest. I drowsed. Suddenly I was jerked awake by a shout. I opened my eyes, to see Raffles, outlined against the watery light from a streetlamp, drawing in his head from the window. The cab had pulled up.

"Someone hailing, Bunny," Raffles said. "We seem to be going through a lot of side streets, no other cabs about. This chap sounded a bit urgent." As he spoke, the hatless figure of a large young man with an umbrella loomed up in the teeming rain and the lamplight. "You there, sir," Raffles called. "Can we give you a lift?"

The man with the umbrella peered in at us. "Oh," he said, "cab's taken. Nice of you to stop." He hesitated. "I'm a doctor, gentlemen."

"In that case, of course," Raffles said promptly, "the cab's entirely at your disposal. Come on, Bunny, out we get."

"No, don't do that," the doctor said. "The fact is, I was going to send the cabbie on an errand. I've a patient in the little shop just back here. Elderly lady. She's in no danger whatever, but there's someone she's asking for and I think it advisable to indulge her. I was going to send the cabbie to fetch the person, but—"

"My friend and I," Raffles said, "will gladly do this small service. Where do we go and who do we fetch?"

"I appreciate this," the doctor said. "You go, then, to Pond Road. It's not far. You go to a place called The Sail Loft and collect a person known, I understand, as Shipmate Sadie, and bring her to Mrs. Maggs's corn chandler's shop, here in Rundle Street. I—"

He moved aside to permit the cabbie's face to appear upside down at the window. "*I* know who the doctor means, gents," the cabbie said. "Shipmate Sadie. I'll take you straight to her. She'll be up and down Pond Road, Saturday night an' all."

He whipped up his horse.

"We'll be back as soon as possible, doctor," Raffles called from the window. He offered me a Sullivan from his cigarette-case. "Shipmate Sadie," he murmured. As he held a match in cupped hands, first to my cigarette, then to his own, the light flickered on his keen, tanned face, and I saw in his gray eyes a lively curiosity, which I fully shared.

Pretty soon, the cab turned into a street where, despite the wind and rain, there were a good many sailors about. They were going in and out of taverns and of small eating-houses where, behind steamy, wet window-

panes, pans of pease pudden and faggots, sausages and onions, bubbled a cheerful invitation and exuded a savory aroma which reminded me that we had had no dinner yet. From naptha-flaring shooting galleries sounded the popping of musketry.

The cab jingled to a standstill and tilted as the cabbie climbed down from the box. He opened the door. "That's her, gents," he said, "across the way there. Shipmate Sadie. Shall I fetch her?"

"Just a minute," Raffles said.

We peered across the street at a group of eight or ten people who stood in a ring near a street-lamp. The gas-jets, wavering in their rainswept glass cage, cast a glimmer over the black oilskins and sou'westers of the men, the yellow oilskins and sou'westers of the women. Some of the men had mouth-organs, and the rest of the group were singing. It was a sea-shanty, and one voice, a girl's, sounded particularly clear and beautiful above the intermittent popping from the rifle galleries.

"That's Shipmate Sadie, gents," said the cabbie. "The young gal."

She could not have been more than nineteen, a brown-eyed girl with a pretty face to which the wind had brought color—a girl in a yellow sou'wester, who exchanged a smile with her companions as they sang together in the rain.

"They takes a turn or two up and down Pond Road," said the cabbie, "to get a few blokes together. This'll be their last turn before they goes inside The Sail Loft."

Behind the group the door of a small, yellow-brick building stood open. There was a lamp above the door. The lamp lit up a board on which was painted: "UNIVERSAL ORDER OF SHIPMATES. We are all fellow voyagers aboard the good ship *Earth,* outward bound under sealed orders. Come into The Sail Loft, sailor, and spin your yarn."

"You get tea and sandwiches inside," said the cabbie. "Yarns and that, and a bit of a sing-song. Kind of philosophers, they are, the Shipmates—none better. Practical, like. Chucked many a bloke a lifebelt. Shall I call the gal over?"

Raffles shook his head. He stepped out of the cab. The cabbie and I followed him across the street. The oilskinned group, who had gathered quite an audience, considering the weather, were making a move to adjourn inside. Raffles raised his cap to the senior of the group, a teak-faced, elderly man who was tapping out his mouth-organ on a tattooed hand.

"Pardon me, sir," Raffles said. "This cabman and my friend and myself have been sent here on an errand. The doctor attending

Mrs. Maggs, of the corn chandler's shop in Rundle Street, wishes us to say that Mrs. Maggs is in no danger but that she's asking for Shipmate Sadie. The doctor would like us to take her back with us. Have we your permission to escort her?" He smiled at the surprised girl. "We promise to return her here safely."

The cabman intervened with a testimonial on our behalf. "These gents is gents, Bose," he explained. " 'Sides, you know me."

"If I don't by now, Sam Vosper," said the teak-faced old chap, apparently known as Bos'un, "I never will, you can lay to that." He put a huge hand on the girl's slim, oilskinned shoulder. "Run along in the cab, then, Sadie, and see what's wanted." He turned to the others, who were all staring at us. "All right, shipmates," he said heartily. "Inside, now! All hands inside!"

Raffles held open the door of the cab for the girl in the yellow sou'wester. He and I took the seat facing her. The horse made a full turn and jingled off back the way we had come.

"May I present my friend Manders?" Raffles said to the girl. "My own name is Raffles."

"I'm Sadie Renton," she said. "I've often seen Mrs. Maggs standing in the background, listening, when we've been singing at street corners and places, but she would always walk away, shaking her head quite angrily, if any of us tried to speak to her. How strange that she should send for me!"

The doctor must have heard the cab pull up outside the little shop in the back street, for he was opening the door as Raffles and I, with the girl between us, ran across the pavement. Sam Vosper, the cabbie, at a call from the doctor, spread a tarpaulin over his horse, and came in out of the rain, too. A single gas-globe burned in the shop, which was full of shadows and a warm, pleasant smell of grain and bran.

"So this is the young lady," said the doctor. "Will you come upstairs, please?"

He took from the counter a candlestick with a lighted candle in it, unlatched a door which gave on to a little flight of cupboarded stairs, and went ahead to light the way for the girl.

Raffles offered cigarettes to Sam and myself. From the ceiling of the shop hung a forest of birdcages for sale, some of them gilded and of elaborate shapes, such as pagodas. All round the floor stood great bins and open sacks, with polished trowels stuck into the grain, and there was an enormous iron scales with brass weights.

The stair door opened and the doctor came in, without his candle. He had a blunt, pleasant

face and sandy, untidy hair. He glanced at us and began to fill a pipe. He seemed to have an ear half cocked to upstairs. Presently the girl began to sing, up in the old lady's bedroom. Down here in the shop, we four men stared at the floor, and somehow, as we listened to the clear yet quiet young voice singing a simple song with a gay, pretty lilt to it, we forgot to smoke.

Can she bake a cherry pie,
Billy boy, Billy boy?
Can she bake a cherry pie,
charmin' Billy?
Yes, she can bake a cherry pie
as quick as a lad can wink
his eye—
She can bake a cherry pie,
charmin' Billy . . .

"Old lady's late husband was called Billy," the doctor murmured to us. "Billy Maggs. Sailor. Bit of a scamp in his time. Swallowed the anchor and opened this shop. Old lady's been running it herself, past few years."

Verse after verse the girl sang, her voice growing quieter and quieter, till we scarcely could hear it, and finally it died away in mid-verse. Instinctively, we all raised our heads, listening. There was a slight sound on the stairs, the latch of the door lifted, the door was opened quietly. The girl had pushed back her sou'wester so that it hung from the tapes tied under her chin. Her dark hair had a soft shine. Her forehead was a little puckered, as though in puzzlement, as she closed the door gently behind her. In the crook of one oilskinned arm she held a brown earthenware teapot with a broken spout.

"She's asleep, doctor," she said. "Is she very ill?"

"She'll live for years, miss," said the doctor. "She's a real hardy old soul. She's liable to these attacks once in a while. Nothing to worry about, but they make her funny-tempered, so she keeps herself to herself. She's perfectly all right and well looked after."

"She told me to get this teapot down off the top of the wardrobe," said Sadie Renton, in wonder. "She said it was mine for a song—*that* song."

"She's taken a great fancy to your singing, miss," said the doctor. "She's traipsed half round the town sometimes, to hear you." He smiled. "Doesn't that teapot weigh a bit heavy? I'd have a look inside, if I were you."

Sadie lifted the lid of the teapot. The color ebbed from her face. Craning my neck, I saw that the teapot was filled with a jumble of banknotes and sovereigns.

"Five hundred pounds in that old teapot," the doctor said, with a chuckle. "She told me. That's for you yourself, miss—you personally. She's talked to me of it

for weeks, worrying herself about the best way to give it to you. Then she got this little attack, and nothing would do but she give you the teapot tonight, with her own hands. She may be a bit queer in her ways, but don't imagine that that's her hoarded life-savings. Mrs. Maggs owns half the houses in this district. So you've got to accept her old teapot and what's in it, or you'll hurt her feelings and turn her into a very hard old woman."

"I—I don't know what to say," Sadie murmured.

"Perhaps it would be as well, doctor," Raffles said, "if we were to take Miss Renton back to her friends, now."

Sadie offered a hand to the doctor. "Thank you," she said. "Thank you for everything."

Sam Vosper, the cabbie, was grinning all over his rubicund face. I never had seen a man more tickled. The rain was coming down faster than ever as, in the dark cab, we quit Rundle Street for the livelier purlieus of Pond Road on Saturday night.

"I expect, Miss Renton," Raffles said pleasantly, as the cab jingled along, "that this well-deserved windfall will make some interesting differences to your life?"

"I shall use it," said Sadie Renton firmly, "to buy back my brother."

It was a strange reply. I sensed that Raffles was as startled by it as I was myself. "Buy back your brother?" he said. "In this day and age— Oh, you mean, perhaps, buy him back out of the Army? Or Navy?"

"Peter's only ten," said Sadie. "No, I—" She hesitated, then said in a rush, "I've been longing to talk to someone about this, but I've hated to worry my friends. I—"

"Sometimes," Raffles said, "it's easier to talk to relative strangers, though I should be sorry to think that Bunny Manders and I will remain for long in any such meager capacity."

"I've had an awful week, up to now," said Sadie. "Awful! I knew how it would be as soon as I saw Uncle Harry's name on the theater bills here this week. You see, my uncle is a ventriloquist. His real name is Harry Renton, but his stage name is Crichton Hook."

"A very striking name, too," Raffles said courteously.

"He's my father's brother," said Sadie, as the horse clip-clopped along through the rain. "My father was a sailor. He warned me many times about Uncle Harry. He said Uncle Harry was a born criminal and that his stage career was only a cover for—other things. Unfortunately, Uncle Harry fascinates Peter, my young brother. Peter and I have rooms, rent free, on The Sail Loft premises, because I look after the premises—the

sweeping and dusting and catering and everything. Last time Uncle Harry was at the theater here, about a year ago, Peter ran away from home and went off with him."

Passing lights flickered in on her pretty face. She was sitting tense and straight in her yellow oilskins, hugging the teapot.

"They simply disappeared together," she said. "I was terrified to go to the police because I didn't know what might be—well, uncovered about Uncle Harry. Luckily, I thought of looking at the stage papers, and I saw that Uncle Harry was appearing in Leeds. I went to Leeds and brought Peter home, but I've never been able to get out of him what really happened during the ten whole days when they simply disappeared, and I'm terribly afraid that Uncle Harry is trying to make Peter a kind of apprentice."

"To ventriloquism?" I asked, deeply interested.

"No, to crime," Sadie said passionately. "Now, all this week, with Uncle Harry in the town again, Peter's been playing truant from school. And from home, too. He keeps sneaking off. At this moment, I feel sure he's in Uncle Harry's dressing-room at the theater. I should have been off to fetch him by now, if you hadn't come for me. But what's happened — Mrs. Maggs's teapot—it's like a miracle! I can hardly believe it's true. You see, it solves everything for me."

"In just what way, Miss Sadie?" Raffles said.

"I know that Uncle Harry is anxious to emigrate to America," she said. "If he only had some capital, I feel sure he'd go tomorrow, and—I should breathe freely about Peter again, for the first time for more than a year. I want that more than anything! I'm so afraid he might run off again at any time. Especially tonight! The theater bill changes weekly. If Uncle Harry's catching a train immediately after the second house, Peter might try to slip off with him again. So I shall go and see Uncle Harry at the theater straight away."

"Miss Sadie," Raffles said, "it so happens that Manders and I know that your uncle has an engagement after the second house tonight. He's to do his turn at a smoking concert in the Wardroom at the Royal Naval Barracks. Now, would you mind if I made a suggestion?"

"Oh, please," she said.

"Your uncle," said Raffles, "is hardly likely to get away from the smoking concert much before twelve-thirty or one o'clock. I suggest that we arrange with Sam Vosper, the cabbie, to collect you at The Sail Loft at, say, a quarter before midnight, and drive you to the vicinity of the Barrack gates. Bunny Manders and I

have been invited to this smoking concert. We'll slip out after your uncle's turn and join you in the cab. When he himself comes out, you can call to him from the cab. You can then make him your offer, to present him with your windfall in exchange for his undertaking to emigrate, in the presence of two impartial witnesses. Don't you think that that might be advisable?"

She at once saw the wisdom of Raffles' suggestion, and still was thanking us when we dropped her off at The Sail Loft in Pond Road.

"You don't have to go the Yellow Sea, Bunny," Raffles said grimly, as the cab jingled on to the Canoe Club, "to encounter a case of holding to ransom. Here's a pretty good example, in this Naval town at home, on a wet Saturday night. Sadie's idealistic, candid, impulsive, vulnerable. It's up to us to see if there isn't some way of preventing this ventriloquial uncle from getting his Crichton hooks on Sadie's windfall."

Our racquets team already had left the Canoe Club for the R. N. Barracks. And when we ourselves, having donned boiled shirts, returned there in Sam Vosper's cab, we found dinner pretty well over in the Ward-room. The stewards were clearing away, the port was going round, tobacco-smoke was floating about the admirals' portraits and the great sideboard of magnificent R. N. plate. Braithwaite got a steward to warm something up for us and, while we ate, the smoker got under way in impromptu style, with drinking songs and so on. Some of the Navy chaps did turns, our racquets No. 2 did a few impersonations that brought the house down, and things were getting a gait on when Raffles tapped my arm and nodded toward the open door to the hall.

A handsome man in cape and silk hat, with a trim tuft of black beard and a long cigarette-holder, was following two stewards, carrying a large "prop" hamper, to a room evidently set aside as a dressing-room. Crichton Hook turned out to be an effective ventriloquist. The large dummy on his knee was dressed in evening clothes, had a white-painted face, movable eyes and a huge, quacking mouth. By clever use of his cigarette-holder, the ventriloquist disguised his throat movements, and the dialogue was witty, though of a nature that scarcely would have answered in mixed company.

With the conclusion of the ventriloquist's turn, there was a general adjournment to the ablutions. Under cover of this, Raffles and I collected our capes and slipped out into the black, blustering night. A couple of hundred yards up the street from

the Barrack gate, with its sentries, Sam Vosper's cab was waiting under a streetlamp.

We joined Sadie in the cab. After a bit of a wait, with the rain beating down on the roof, we saw the ventriloquist come walking out of the Barrack gates with our racquets team. They started shouting "Cab!" as they came up the street, but Sam answered austerely, "Engaged!" The group was going on past, our racquets chaps a bit lit up and noisy, when Sadie leaned from the window, in the yellow sou'wester that framed her pretty face, and called, "Uncle Harry! May I speak to you for a moment?"

I heard the ventriloquist say to our chaps, "I'll say good night to you, gentlemen." He came to the cab window. "Well, well," he said. "My niece Sadie—all the world's little Shipmate. Full of good works." He opened the cab door, then checked sharply, peering in. "What's this?" he said. "Who've you got in there with you?"

"Two friends," Sadie said, "whom I want to hear what I have to say to you."

"You're getting very wet, Mr. Renton," Raffles said, as the ventriloquist hesitated suspiciously. "Why don't you join us and hear what your niece has to say? She's had a windfall of five hundred pounds. Who knows? You may hear something to your advantage." He struck a match as the ventriloquist ducked into the cab and took the seat beside me. "You see?" Raffles said. "In the teapot your niece is holding—five hundred pounds in notes and sovereigns."

The ventriloquist fitted a cigarette into his long holder. His hands were unsteady. His eyes were fixed on the teapot, from which Sadie had lifted the lid. Raffles touched the match politely to the man's cigarette.

"Uncle Harry," Sadie said, "where is Peter?"

"Why, my dear," said the ventriloquist, and his tone was very different from the offensive sarcasm of his greeting to her, "isn't he at home? I found him hanging round the Stage Door—as he *will* do, I'm afraid—when I came out at five-thirty, after the *matinee*. As I'm off in the morning, and won't be seeing him again for a long time, I gave him a sovereign for himself and told him to cut along home and be a good boy and do what his sister told him. If he's not at home—why, now, perhaps he's spending the night with one of his kid friends. Have you tried their houses? Perhaps," he added contritely, "I oughtn't to have given him a whole quid—boy of ten."

"Mr. Renton," Raffles said, "when her young brother is again safely in her charge, your niece is thinking of giving you

this money to enable you to do what I understand you wish to do—that is, emigrate. In the light of that, do you care to revise your statement at all?"

The ventriloquist peered from Raffles to myself in the faint light from the streetlamp in the pouring rain. "Solicitors," he muttered. "I begin to get the strength of this. Sadie my dear, I'm a little surprised that you should have brought solicitors into a purely family matter. In view of the presence of solicitors, I won't say too much. I'll merely grant—without prejudice, mind you—that I'm fond of the boy, that it's possible he asked me to take him away with me again, that it's possible that to obviate the chance of a scene with you at the station, Sadie, I sent him on ahead to a station up the line a bit, where he was to get off and go to the house of a friend of mine, where I'd collect him on my way up in the morning. All that's quite possible, I admit—without prejudice."

"Shall we, then," Raffles said, "see if we're too late to get a train to the station you mention? There may well be a milk train. The sooner the boy is in your niece's charge, Mr. Renton, the sooner we can discuss the terms on which she'll hand you her windfall of five hundred pounds."

"I'm hurt and angry that Sadie has brought solicitors into this family matter," said the ventriloquist. He opened the cab door, stepped out into the rain. "Sadie," he said, through the window, "be on this spot at nine-thirty tomorrow morning, and it's possible the boy may be here, too. I say that entirely without prejudice."

He walked off into the night. And Raffles said quietly, "Sadie, is there a friend's house where you could sleep? I don't think it wise for you to stay alone at The Sail Loft tonight with Mrs. Maggs's teapot. Now, you're not to worry. I think I can promise you that Peter will be safely in your charge again tomorrow morning."

We took Sadie to the house of the Bos'un and his wife, which proved to be in Pond Road. Having knocked up this decent couple, and seen Sadie safely inside, Raffles told Sam to drive us to any eating-house he knew of which would be open. This turned out to be a faggot shop and, taking Sam in with us, we sat down to a good plate apiece of faggots with all the trimmings.

"Sam," said Raffles, as we supped, "you look to me like a man who can keep a still tongue in his head. What's more, I don't think there's much you'd stop at to give one of the Shipmates of Pond Road a helping hand—the way they've given a helping hand to many a seafaring chap. Is that right?"

The cabbie nodded. His little blue eyes glittered in his rubicund face.

"Right," Raffles said. "Sam, you know half the story. You know what happened tonight at Mrs. Maggs's shop. I'm going to tell you the rest of it, because we need your help. The man who joined us in your cab just now is, as you doubtless know, Sadie's uncle. He's after her windfall. What's more, Sam, he's put her young brother, whom you doubtless also know, in a position of extreme danger."

I stared at Raffles in astonishment.

"The boy," said Raffles, "at this moment, is hidden among a number of ventriloquial dummies, in a large 'prop' hamper, in a room inside the Officers' Quarters in the Royal Naval Barracks. Why do you look at me like that, Bunny? It's obvious. If Renton could have produced the boy, he'd have done it—to get his hands on Sadie's money. He couldn't produce the boy, because he'd committed the boy to an enterprise—the theft from the Wardroom plate cupboard of that trophy which has been in the news recently, H. M. S. *Stingray's* salver."

The blood rushed into my head. "How can you be sure?"

"Renton brought that hamper to the Barracks tonight," Raffles said, "but he didn't have it when he came out. Obviously, he must have asked permission, on the grounds of there being few cabs about at such a late hour, to leave his hamper and pick it up in the morning before catching his train. I don't doubt that that hamper has trick straps which can be unbuckled from inside. When all is quiet and dark in the Officers' Quarters, the boy'll get out of the hamper. Whether the plan is for the boy himself to attempt the plate cupboard, or merely to open a window or unbolt a door to let Renton in, we don't know. What's sure, I think, is that the hamper straps can be readjusted in such a way as to make it appear perfectly innocent. Having got away in the night with the boy and the swag, Renton'll return in the morning to collect a perfectly innocent hamper. There'll be nothing whatever to connect him with the theft of this Royal Navy trophy."

"Gents," Sam said hoarsely, "we'd better go to the coppers."

"With the boy redhanded there in the Officers' Quarters?" Raffles said. "What d'you want to do, Sam—break Sadie's heart and hand her windfall to Renton on a plate? If the boy's caught where he is, nothing on earth'll keep him out of a reformatory for the rest of his boyhood. And if Renton himself is caught, what'll Sadie do? Because she's what she is—a Shipmate, an idealist—she'll forgive him, and

she'll spend every penny in Mrs. Maggs's teapot on the legal defense of what I take to be her only two living relatives, her uncle and her kid brother. Instead of getting her money directly, Renton'll thus get it indirectly. No, there's only one way to queer Renton's pitch, both as regards Sadie's windfall *and* the *Stingray* salver. We've got to steal the boy out of the Wardroom in the R. N. Barracks before Renton gets to him."

"Who *are* you gents?" said Sam, staring.

"Two very humble admirers of Shipmate Sadie of Pond Road," Raffles said. "Who are you, Vosper?"

"Count me in," said Sam, with a dark flush. "What do I do?"

"Renton has this advantage," Raffles said—"this is his home town. He probably knows the best way to tackle that high, spiked wall round the R. N. Barracks, and something of the patrolling habits of the sentries. We don't. But I've no doubt *you* do, Sam, and that's where we need your help."

Sam put down his knife and fork. "Damn the odds," he said. "Come on, gents."

He drove us first to his jobbing stables, to pick up a rope and some cord. Then he drove us with a clip-clop and jingle, by way of cobbled, deserted back streets where only an occasional bracket-lamp on a corner glimmered wanly in the wind and rain, to a point under the high wall of the R. N. Barracks.

From the roof of Sam's cab, which easily bore us, as he carried luggage on it, Raffles was able to reach the spikes on top of the wall. He pulled himself up. I hauled myself up after him. The wind tore at our capes. The rain beat down on us. Raffles knotted the rope to one of the spikes, lowered himself down on the other side of the wall. I followed him down. Here and there in the black night, a dim light burned over the door of a barrack block.

Orienting ourselves carefully, so as to be able to find our way back to where we had left the rope hanging, we found our way to the rainswept open space of the barrack square. A dim light burned over the great, handsome doors of the Officers' Quarters. Avoiding the light, we skirted round the side of the building.

"Here's a likely-looking window, Bunny," Raffles muttered. "Pity we couldn't have cased the crib better. There are certainly officers asleep upstairs, but we don't know whether there's any steward or fire picquet on night duty. We've got to chance it. While I work on the window, keep your eyes peeled for Renton. He may be prowling round by now."

My heart thumped slow and

heavy as I strained my eyes into the rainy blackness. It seemed an interminable time before I heard Raffles whisper, "All right, I have the window open. We're in luck. I can hear water trickling in there. It's the downstairs ablutions. It gives me my bearings. There's a corridor runs straight to the hall. The room at the far end of the corridor is the one where we saw Renton's hamper put. The boy's probably just about beginning to unbuckle the straps. It's a pity, but I'm bound to give the kid a scare. Can't be helped. He's only ten. He might cry out. I shall have to grab him on sight, with a hand over his mouth—probably as he steps out of the hamper."

"Aren't I to come in?" I whispered, in dismay.

"No, stay here," Raffles said. "The kid's bound to struggle. I'll have to truss him and gag him and pass him out to you. If you hear a shot inside, it'll mean there *is* a night duty steward or fire picquet and that he's taken a pot at me. If that happens, leg it for all you're worth and get old Sam away. Now, if anyone comes prowling round the side here, it'll almost surely be Renton. Choose your moment and then say—but not *too* dam' loud—'Renton, you're under arrest!' That ought to start him emigrating on the spot, as fast as he can move, which is what we want. Don't let him see you, in case he's armed and takes a pot at *you*. Right, I'm off."

He threw a leg over the sill, ducked in under the sash.

All was black. Here at the side of the building, no wind reached, but I could hear its surge and bluster over the barrack square. My eyes by now were fairly attuned to the darkness and I drew back a little from the black gap of the open window. I found it hard to believe that so short a while before I had been a guest of the Wardroom, with its roaring fire, its splendid portraits, its array of magnificent plate. I thought of the gold salver with the ruby dragon, the Yellow Sea salver that had been the mandarin's gift of gratitude to H. M. S. *Stingray*.

Suddenly my thoughts and my breath stopped as one. In the teeming downpour a black shape moved, skulking along close under the wall of the building. The figure paused. It could only be Renton, for I could just discern that he was examining each window—doubtless looking for a window opened for him by the boy. Now, he came to the open window. He checked, peering in, his back to me. I drew in my breath.

"Renton," I said, deep in my throat, "you're under arrest!"

He spun round, ducked, ran. There was nothing but the blackness, the pouring rain, the rush

and bluster of the wind across the barrack square.

It was perhaps five minutes, but it felt like five hours, before I heard Raffles' whisper from the window. "Bunny?"

He passed out the boy, trussed up and gagged, and I got him jack-knifed over my shoulder.

"Wait for me at the rope," Raffles whispered. "I'm going back to fix the straps of that hamper, then I'll re-latch the window when I come out."

I made off into the dark with the boy over my shoulder. I had not much more than found the rope hanging from the spiked wall than Raffles flitted up alongside me. He took the boy from me.

"Shin on up, Bunny," he said. "I'll pass him up to you."

I got an anchorage among the spikes on top of the wall and, with the wind tearing at me, reached down for the boy. Raffles shinned up and took the boy again. I lowered myself down on to the roof of Sam's cab and, while old Sam held his horse in hard, I took the boy from Raffles. Raffles untied the rope, and in a moment we were inside the cab, with the boy between us, and old Sam was whipping his horse up.

Not until we were in the parlor of the Canoe Club annexe, where our racquets team were all upstairs in bed and asleep, did I get a look at the boy. It was the shock of my life. Raffles had untied him in the cab, and now he sat on a chair, silently staring at us. The boy was dressed in a miniature suit of evening clothes, with scarlet-lined cape. His face was painted dead white, with a clown's great, painted grin. Only his brown eyes and his shock of curly dark hair looked human. He was got up as a ventriloquial dummy, though he was not the dummy which Crichton Hook had used for his turn at the Wardroom smoking-concert.

Raffles poured stiff whiskies for Sam, himself, and me, and ginger wine for the boy.

"Sam," Raffles said, "will you pick us up here at nine in the morning? Here's twenty quid, Sam, and we wish it were twenty hundred."

"Gents," said Sam, hoarse with emotion as we shook hands warmly, "I'll never forget tonight. Never! Not from the minute the doc run out into Rundle Street."

He went off, shaking his head. Raffles drew me aside. He asked me if I had seen any sign of Renton, and I told him what had happened.

"Excellent," he said, with a gray gleam in his eyes. "Just what I hoped. Well done, Bunny! He'll think the police set a trap for him because the boy had been caught and had talked. I don't think there's much chance of the great Crichton Hook returning to this town as long as

he lives. I think we can take it that he's emigrated — without Mrs. Maggs's teapot and without the mandarin's gift to the Royal Navy. The boy's our problem, now."

He turned to the boy.

"Aren't you going to drink your ginger wine, Peter?"

The boy glowered. He looked most eccentric.

"He's pretty wet, Bunny," Raffles said. "Tell you what, I'll poke up the fire here a bit, you fetch down some towels and blankets, then just leave him to me."

What Raffles said to the boy, I did not know. I slept like a log. When I went down in the morning, the parlor door was ajar, and I heard Raffles speaking.

"So you've definitely decided, then," he said, "that to be a cracksman when you grow up is hardly worth all the wear and tear of the long apprenticeship?"

"I'd rather be a sailor, A. J." the boy's voice said.

"You're absolutely right," Raffles said. "All right, Peter, I'll talk to the man who runs the training ship I told you about. I'm sure he'll be glad to have you aboard. I'll write to Sadie about it."

They sounded as thick as thieves. I opened the door. The two of them were breakfasting at a table before the fire. Raffles was freshly shaved, his hair dark and crisp. He wore tweeds, with a pearl in his cravat. The boy was wearing Raffles' racquets sweater with the sleeves rolled up and Raffles' white flannels with the ends rolled up. He looked a bit lost in them. Otherwise, with the paint all gone from his face, he was a good-looking kid. In fact, he looked a lot like Sadie.

"Ah, here's Bunny," Raffles said. "'Morning, Bunny. The chaps have gone. They all caught the early train. And there's old Sam Vosper's cab just jingling up outside in the rain. Bad luck, Bunny, you've missed your breakfast."

When we dropped the boy off at The Sail Loft, on our way to the station, he shook hands with us both.

"We'll be seeing you again, Peter," Raffles said. "Just hang on to my flannels and sweater till then. And, Peter—tell Sadie to take good care of Mrs. Maggs's teapot."

The boy looked back at us with a laugh and a wave as he ran across the pavement. The horse clip-clopped on, and Raffles offered me his cigarette-case. As I took a Sullivan, I glanced back through the little, oval window. I saw a girl run out into the rain, a girl in yellow oilskins and a sou'wester, who checked, with a hand half raised, as though to call us back.

From the opposite pavement, a man with an umbrella walked

across the street to her. I had not noticed him before. He was the burly young doctor who attended Mrs. Maggs. He must have been hanging about here for some reason of his own.

He spoke smilingly to Sadie, and she glanced up at him with a quick, answering smile.

The young doctor held his umbrella over her protectively as, watching our cab jingle away past the closed taverns, faggot shops and shooting galleries of Pond Road, they stood together outside the little yellow-brick building with the door which was always wide open in welcome, under the words: UNIVERSAL ORDER OF SHIPMATES.

UNUSUAL HAND LUGGAGE

WITHIN HOURS of Batista's flight from Havana, one of Fidel Castro's underground agents in this country was telling how they'd bought whatever arms they could get hold of, and then sent them down to Miami by plane, by car or by truck, with friends. People would see pretty Cuban and American girls carrying hand luggage and they'd smile, he said. How could they know that machine guns or .45 caliber pistols were in those bags!

NEXT MONTH—

John Dickson Carr's THE PROVERBIAL MURDERER

George Harmon Coxe's FRIGHTENED CANARY

Andre Gide's THE CRIME OF YVES CORDIER

E. X. Ferrar's AFTER DEATH THE DELUGE

Theodore Mathieson's SECOND SPRING

Leslie Charteris' THE HOMECOMING OF AMADEO URSELLI

and

MURDER BY THE STARS

A NEW STORY by LAWRENCE G. BLOCHMAN

—in *THE SAINT MYSTERY MAGAZINE*

the brass buddha

by . . . Leslie Charteris

Simon's faith in the gods was sublime — and justified. They rarely disappointed him in his search for adventure.

"HAVE another drink," said Ambrose Grange.

He was a man with a lot to say, but that was his theme song. He had used it so many times during the course of that evening that Simon Templar had begun to wonder whether Sir Ambrose imagined he had invented a new and extraordinarily subtle philosophy, and was patiently plugging it at intervals until his audience grasped the point. It bobbed up along the line of his conversation like vitamins in a food reformer's menu. Tapping resources which seemed inexhaustible, he delved into the kit-bag of memory for reminiscences and into his trouser pockets for the price of Peter Dawson; and the Saint obliged him by absorbing both with equal courtesy.

"Yes, sir," resumed Sir Ambrose, when their glasses had been refilled. "Business is business. That is my motto, and it always will be. If you happen to know that something is valuable, and the other fellow doesn't, you have every right to buy it from him at his price without disclosing your knowledge. He gets what he thinks is a fair price, you get your profit, and you're both sat-

THE PROBLEM OF HOW TO PERSUADE THIS SEPTIC SPECIMEN TO CONTRIBUTE TO HIS OLD AGE INTRIGUED THE SAINT.

From: THE BRIGHTER BUCCANEER
Copyright, 1933, by Leslie Charteris

isfied. Isn't that what goes on every day on the Stock Exchange? If you receive inside information that certain shares are going to rise, you buy as many as you can. You probably never meet the man who sells them to you, but that doesn't alter the fact of what you're doing. You're deliberately taking advantage of your knowledge to purchase something for a fraction of its value, and it never occurs to you that you ought to tell the seller that if he held on to his shares for another week he could make all the profit for himself."

"Quite," murmured the Saint politely.

"And so," said Sir Ambrose, patting the Saint's knee impressively with his flabby hand, "when I heard that the path of the new by-pass road cut straight through the middle of that old widow's property, what did I do? Did I go to her and say, 'Madam, in another week or two you'll be able to put your own price on this house, and any bank or building society would be glad to lend you enough to pay off this installment of the mortgage'? Why, if I'd done anything like that I should have been a fool, sir—a sentimental old fool. Of course I didn't. It was the old geezer's own fault if she was too stupid and doddering to know what was going on around her. I simply foreclosed at once; and in three weeks I'd sold her house for fifteen times as much as I gave her for it. That's business." Sir Ambrose chortled wheezily over the recollection. "By gad, if words could break bones I should be wheeling myself about in an invalid chair still. But that kind of thing doesn't worry *me!* . . . Have another drink."

"Have one with me," suggested the Saint half-heartedly; but Sir Ambrose waved the invitation aside.

"No, sir. I never allow a young man to pay for my drinks. Have a good time with me. The same again?"

Simon nodded, and lighted a cigarette while Sir Ambrose toddled over to the bar. He was a pompous and rather tubby little man, with a waxed moustache that matched his silver-gray spats, and a well-wined complexion that matched the carnation in his button-hole; and the Saint did not like him. In fact, running over a lengthy list of gentlemen of whom he had gravely disapproved, Simon Templar found it difficult to name anyone whom he had felt less inclined to take into his bosom with vows of eternal brotherhood.

He disliked Sir Ambrose no less heartily because he had known him less than a couple of hours. With an idle evening to spend by himself, the Saint had sailed out into the West End of London to pass it as entertainingly as he could. He had no

plans whatever, but his faith in the beneficence of the gods was sublime. Thus he had gone in search of adventure before, and he had rarely been disappointed. To him, the teeming thousands of assorted souls who jostled through the sky-sign area on a Saturday night were so many oysters who might be opened by a man with the clairvoyant eye and delicate touch which the Saint claimed for his genius. It was a business of drifting where the whim guided him, following an impulse and hoping that it might lead to an interest, taking a chance and not caring if it failed.

In just that spirit of careless optimism he had wandered into a small hotel in a quiet street behind the Strand and discovered an almost deserted bar where he could imbibe a glass of ale while seeking inspiration for his next move. And it was there that a casual remark about the weather had floated him into the acquaintance of Sir Ambrose, who, having presented his card, pulled out the opening chord of his theme song and said: "Have a drink?"

Simon had a drink. Even before the state of the weather arose as an introduction, he had felt a professional curiosity to know whether anybody could be quite as unsavory a bore as Sir Ambrose looked. And he had not been disappointed. Within five minutes Sir Ambrose had him sitting in a corner listening to the details of an ingenious trick he had invented as a boy at school for swindling his contemporaries out of their weekly ration of toffee. Within ten minutes Sir Ambrose was leading on to a description of the smart deals on a larger scale which had built up his comfortable fortune. He seemed to have had several drinks on his own before he started intoning his chorus to the Saint. The effects of them had not added to his charm. And the more cordially Simon learned to detest him, the more intently Simon listened—for it had dawned on the Saint that perhaps his evening was being well spent.

Sir Ambrose returned with steps that could have been steadier, and slopped over some of the whisky as he deposited their glasses on the table. He sat down again and leaned back with a sigh of large-waisted well-being. "Yes, sir," he resumed tirelessly. "Sentiment is no good. My uncle was sentimental, and what did it do for him?"

Not having known Sir Ambrose's uncle, Simon found the question unanswerable.

"It made him a pest to his heirs," said Sir Ambrose, solving the riddle. "That's what it did. Not that he left much for us to inherit—a beggarly ten thousand odd was all that he managed to keep out of the hands of the parasites who traded on his soft

heart. But what did he do with it?"

Once again the Saint was nonplussed. Sir Ambrose, however, did not really require assistance.

"Look at this," he said.

He dragged a small brass image out of his pocket and set it up on the table between the glasses. Simon glanced at it, and recognized it at once. It was one of those pyramidal figures of a seated Buddha, miniatures of the gigantic statue at Kamakura, which find their place in every tourists' curio shop from Karachi to Yokohama.

"That, sir," said the sentimentalist's nephew, "was my uncle's. He bought it in Shanghai when he was a young man, and he called it his mascot. He used to burn a joss-stick in front of it every day — said the ju-ju wouldn't work without it. And then, when he died, what do you think we found in his will?"

Simon was getting accustomed to Sir Ambrose's interrogative style, but the Saint was not very easily silenced.

"A thousand quid to buy joss-sticks," he hazarded.

Sir Ambrose shook his head rather impatiently, till both his chins wobbled.

"No, sir. Something much worse than that. We found that not a penny of his money could be touched until this ridiculous thing had been sold for two thousand pounds. He said that only a man who was prepared to pay a sum like that for it would appreciate it properly and give it the attention he wanted. Personally, I think that anyone who paid a sum like that for it could be put in a lunatic asylum without a certificate. But there it is in his will, and the lawyers say we can't upset it. I've been carrying the damned thing about with me half a week, showing it to all the antique shops in London, and the best offer I've had is fifteen shillings."

"But surely," said the Saint, "you could get a friend of yours to buy it, and give him the two thousand back with a spot of interest as soon as the executors unbuttoned?"

"If anything like that could have been done, sir, I'd have done it. But the old fool thought of that himself, and he left strict instructions that the executors were to be satisfied beyond all possible doubt that the sale was a genuine one. And he made his bank the executors, damn him! If you've ever tried to put anything over on a bank you'll know what a hope we've got of doing anything like that. No—the best thing we can ever hope to do is to find some genuine stranger and sell it to him while he's drunk."

Simon picked up the image and examined it closely. It was unexpectedly heavy, and he guessed that the brass casting must have been filled with lead. On the base

there was a line of Chinese characters cut into the metal and filled with red.

"Funny language," observed Sir Ambrose, leaning over to point to the characters. "I've often wanted to meet a Chink who could tell me what they write on things like this. Look at that thing there like a tadpole with wings. I'll bet that's a particularly dirty swear—it's twice the size of the other words. Have a drink."

The Saint looked at his watch.

"I'm afraid I'll have to be getting home," he observed.

"Come and see me one evening," said Sir Ambrose. "You've got my address on my card, and I like young company. Come along one night next week, and I'll invite some girls."

Simon reached his flat in time to see Peter Quentin and Patricia Holm climbing out of a taxi. They were in evening dress, and the Saint surveyed them rudely.

"Well," he said, "have you mugs finished pretending to be numbers one and two of the Upper Ten?"

"He's jealous," said Patricia, on Peter Quentin's arm. "His own tails have been in pawn so long that the moths have done them in."

A misguided friend had presented the Saint with tickets for the Opera. Simon Templar, in one of his fits of perversity, had stated in no uncertain terms that it was too hot to put on a starched shirt and listen to perspiring tenors dying in C flat for four hours, and Peter Quentin had volunteered to be Patricia's escort.

"We thought of some bacon and eggs," Peter said, "and we wondered if you'd like to treat us."

"I thought you might treat me," murmured the Saint. "As an inducement for me to be seen out with a girl whose clothes have all slipped down below her waist, and a pie-faced tough disguised as a waiter, it's the least you can offer."

Back in the taxi, they asked him how he had spent the evening.

"I've been drinking with one of the most septic specimens in London," said the Saint thoughtfully. "And if I can't make him wish he hadn't told me so much about himself I won't have another bath for six years."

The problem of securing an adequate contribution towards his old age pension from Sir Ambrose Grange occupied the Saint's mind considerably for the next twenty-four hours. Sir Ambrose had gratuitously introduced himself as such a perfect example of the type of man whom the Saint prayed to meet that Simon felt that his reputation was at stake. Unless something suitably unpleasant happened to Sir Ambrose in a very short space of time, the

Saint would sink down to somewhere near zero in his own estimation of himself—a possibility that was altogether too dreadful to contemplate.

He devoted most of the Sabbath to revolving various schemes in his mind, all of which were far less holy than the day; but he had not finally decided on any of them when the solution literally fell into his arms by a coincidence that seemed too good to be true.

This happened on the Monday afternoon.

He sallied out of his flat into Piccadilly in the hope of finding a paper with the winner of the Eclipse Stakes, and as he stepped on to the pavement a middle-aged man in horn-rimmed spectacles and a Panama who was hurrying past suddenly staggered in his direction, and would have fallen if the Saint had not caught him. Several passers-by turned and watched curiously; and Simon Templar, whose ideas of grandstanding heroism were not of that type, was tempted to deposit the middle-aged gent tenderly on the pavement and let him do his dying gladiator act alone. The man in the Panama was no human hairpin, and his legs seemed to have turned to rubber.

Then Simon saw that the man's eyes were open. He grinned at the Saint crookedly.

"Sorry, friend," he said, in the broadest Yankee. "I'll be okay in a minute. Been trying to do too much after my operation, I guess —the doc told me I'd crack up if I didn't take it easy . . . Gosh, look at the rubbernecks waitin' to see me die! Say, do you live in there? Is there a foyer I can sit down in? I don't wanna be stared at like I was the Nelson Monument."

Simon helped the man inside and sat him on a settee beside the elevator. The American tipped off his Panama and wiped his forehead with a bandanna handkerchief.

"Just four days outa the hospital and tearin' about like a fool for two of 'em. And missed my lunch today. That's what's done it. Say, is there a public telephone here? I promised to meet my wife an hour ago, and she must think I had myself a street accident."

"I'm afraid there isn't," said the Saint. "This is just a block of flats."

"Well, I guess I'll just be bawled out. Gosh, but that poor kid'll be worried stiff!"

Simon looked up at the clock. He was in no great hurry.

"You can phone from my flat if you like," he said. "It's on the second floor."

"Say, that's real kind of you!"

The Saint helped him into the elevator, and they shot upwards. Settled in an armchair beside the telephone, the American made a reassuring call to the Savoy Hotel number. Simon thought it was ex-

cessively sloppy, but it was not his business.

"Well, that's that," said his guest, and when the gush was over, "I guess I owe you something for your kindness. Have a cigar?"

Simon accepted the weed. It was a large fat one, with a lovely picture on the band.

"Think of me cracking up like that in your arms!" prattled the American, whose vocal cords at least seemed unimpaired. "Gosh, you musta thought I was something out of a flower-bed. I didn't know they could take that much outa you along with your appendix. And all this fuss to find a damn brass Buddha! Gosh, it makes you wonder what nut started this collecting game."

The Saint, with a match halfway to his cigar, stared at him till the flame scorced his fingers.

"Brass Buddha?" he said faintly. "Who wants a brass Buddha?"

"Louis Froussard wants one, if that means anything to you, friend. But here am I in your apartment, and you don't even know my name. Allow me." The American dug out his wallet, extracted a card, and handed it over. "James G. Amberson, at your service. Any time you want one of Napoleon's skulls, or the original pajamas the Queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon—I'm just the man to go and find 'em. Yes, sir. That's my job—huntin' for missing links for museums and millionaires who feel they gotta collect something so's they can give the reporters something to write about. That's me."

"And you want a brass Buddha?" said the Saint, almost caressingly.

James G. Amberson (according to his card, the G. stood for Gardiner, which the Saint thought was very modest—it might have been Gabriel) flapped a raw-boned hand deprecatingly.

"Aw, you ain't gonna offer me the thing your auntie brought home last time she went on a world cruise, are you? Everyone in London's got a brass Buddha, but none of 'em is the right one. This one's a special one—you wouldn't know it to look at it, but it is. Some Chink emperor back in about two million B. C. had three of 'em made for his three daughters, who were no better than they shoulda been, accordin' to history—you don't wanna know all that hooey, do you? I guess I'm a bit fuddled over it myself. But anyhow, Lou Froussard has got two of 'em, and he wants the third. I gotta find it. Sounds like I'd taken on a long job, don't it?"

Simon drew on his cigar a little less impetuously.

"How will you know this particular one when you find it?" he asked.

"Say, that's easy. It's got a lit-

tle Chinese dedication carved in the base and filled with red paint. I don't know any language except plain English, but this daughter's name comes in the dedication and I got a Chink to show me what it looked like—Gosh, is that cigar sour or something?"

"No—it's a swell cigar. Would you mind showing me what this name looks like?"

The other's eyes opened rather blankly, but he took out a pencil and sketched a character on the back of the envelope.

"There she is, friend. Say, you're looking at me like I was a mummy come to life. What's the matter?"

The Saint filled his lungs. For him, the day had suddenly bloomed out into a rich surpassing beauty that only those who have shared his delight in damaging the careers of pompous old sinners with bushy gray face-hair can understand. The radiance of his own inspiration dazzled him.

"Nothing's the matter," he said seraphically. "Nothing on earth could be the matter on a day like this. How many millions will your Mr. Froussard give for that Buddha?"

"Well, millions is a large word," said Amberson, cautiously, looking at the Saint in not unreasonable perplexity. "But I guess I could pay fifteen thousand bucks for it."

"You find the bucks, and I'll find your Buddha," said the Saint.

Amberson grinned, and stood up.

"I don't know whether you've got an ace in the hole or whether you're just pulling my leg," he remarked; "but if you can find that Buddha the fifteen grand are waitin' for you. Say, I'm real grateful to you for helpin' me out like this. Come to the Savoy and have lunch tomorrow—and you can bring the Buddha with you if you've found it."

"Thanks," said the Saint. "I'll do both."

He showed Amberson to the door, and came straight back to grab the telephone. Sir Ambrose Grange was out, he was informed, but he was expected back about six. Simon bought his evening paper, found that the favorite had won—he never backed favorites—and was at the telephone again, when the hour struck.

"I'm taking you at your word and coming over to see you, Sir Ambrose."

"Delighted, my dear sir," said the knight, somewhat plaintively. "But if you'd told me I could have got hold of some girls—"

"Never mind the girls," said Simon.

He arrived at the lodgings in Seymour Street where Sir Ambrose maintained his modest bachelor pied-à-terre half an hour later, and plunged into his business without preliminaries.

"I've come to buy your

Buddha," he said. "Two thousand was what your uncle wanted, wasn't it?"

Sir Ambrose goggled at him for some seconds; and then he laughed feebly.

"Ho, ho, ho! I bought that one, didn't I, by gad! Getting a bit slow on the uptake, what? Never mind, sir—have a drink."

"I'm not being comic," said the Saint. "I want your Buddha and I'll give you two thousand for it. I backed sixteen losers last week, and if I don't get a good mascot I shall be in the bankruptcy court."

After several minutes he was able to convince Sir Ambrose that his lunacy, if inexplicable, was backed up by a ready check book. He wrote the figures with a flourish, and Sir Ambrose found himself fumbling for a piece of paper and a stamp to make out the receipt.

Simon read the document through—it was typical.

Received from Mr. Simon Templar, by check, the sum of Two Thousand Pounds, being payment for a Brass Buddha which he knows is only worth fifteen shillings.

Ambrose Grange.

"Just to prove I knew what I was doing? I expected that."

Sir Ambrose looked at him suspiciously.

"I wish I knew what you wanted that thing for," he said. "Even my uncle only wanted us to get a thousand for it, but I thought I'd double it for luck. Two thousand couldn't be much more impossible than one." He heaved with chin-quivering mirth. "Well, my dear sir, if you can make a profit on two thousand, I shan't complain. Ho, ho, ho, ho! Have a drink."

"Sometimes," said the Saint quite affably, "I wonder why there's no law classifying men like you as vermin and authorizing you to be sprayed with DDT on sight."

He routed out Peter Quentin before going home that night, and uttered the same philosophy to him—even more affably. The brass Buddha sat on a table beside his bed when he turned in, and he blew it a kiss before he switched out the light and sank into the dreamless sleep of a contented corsair.

He paraded at the Savoy at twelve-thirty the next day.

At two o'clock Patricia Holm found him in the grill room.

Simon beckoned the waiter who had just poured out his coffee, and asked for another cup.

"Well," he said, "where's Peter?"

"His girl friend stopped in a shop window to look at some stockings, so I came on." Her eyebrows were faintly question-

ing. "I thought you were lunching with that American."

Simon dropped two lumps of sugar into his cup and stirred it lugubriously.

"Pat," he said, "you may put this down in your notes for our textbook on Crime—the perfect confidence trick, Version Two. Let me tell you about it."

She lighted a cigarette slowly, staring at him.

"The Mug," said the Saint deliberately, "meets an Unpleasant Man. The Unpleasant Man purposely makes himself out to be so sharp that no normally healthy Mug could resist the temptation to do him down if the opportunity arose; and he may credit himself with a title just to remove all suspicion. The Unpleasant Man has something to sell—it might be a brass Buddha, valued at fifteen shillings, for which he's got to realize some fantastic sum like two thousand quid under the terms of an eccentric will. The Mug admits that the problem is difficult, and passes out into the night."

Simon annexed Patricia's cigarette, and inhaled from it.

"Shortly afterwards," he said, "the Mug meets the Nice American who is looking for a very special brass Buddha valued at fifteen thousand bucks. The nice American gives away certain information which allows the Mug to perceive, beyond all possible doubt, that this rare and special Buddha is the very one for which the Unpleasant Man was trying to get what he thought was the fantastic price of two thousand quid. The Mug, therefore, with the whole works taken right down into his stomach—hook, line and sinker—dashes around to the Unpleasant Man and gives him his two thousand quid. And he endorses a receipt saying he knows it's only worth fifteen bob, so that the Unpleasant Man can prove himself innocent of deception. Then the Mug goes to meet the Nice American and collect his profit . . . And, Pat, I regret to say that he pays for his own lunch."

The Saint gazed sadly at the folded bill which a waiter had just placed on the table.

Patricia was wide-eyed.

"Simon! Did you—"

"I did. I paid two thousand quid of our hard-won boodle to the preambulating sausage—"

He broke off, with his own jaw sinking.

James G. Amberson was flying across the room, with his Panama hat waving in his hand and his spectacles gleaming. He flung himself into a chair at the Saint's table.

"Say, did you think I was dead? My watch musta stopped while I was huntin' through junk stores in Limehouse—I saw the clock outa the taxi window as I was comin' back, and almost had a heart attack. Gosh, I'm sorry!"

"That's all right," murmured the Saint. "Pat, you haven't met Mr. Amberson. This is our Nice American. James G.—Miss Patricia Holm."

"Say, I'm real pleased to meet you, Miss Holm. Guess Mr. Templar told you how I fainted in his arms yesterday." Amberson reached over and wrung the girl's hand heartily. "Well, Mr. Templar, if you've had lunch you can have a liqueur." He waved to a waiter. "And, say, did you find me that Buddha?"

Simon bent down and hauled a small parcel out from under the table.

"This is it."

Amberson gaped at the package for a second; and then he grabbed it and tore it open. He gaped again at the contents—then at the Saint.

"Well, I'm a son of a— Excuse me, Miss Holm, but—"

"Is that right?" asked the Saint.

"I'll say it is!" Amberson was fondling the image as if it were his own long-lost child. "What did I promise you? Fifteen thousand berries?"

He pulled out his wallet and spilled American bills on to the table.

"Fifteen grand it is, Mr. Templar. And I guess I'm grateful. Mind if I leave you now? I gotta get on the transatlantic 'phone to Lou Froussard and tell him, and then I gotta rush this little precious into a safe deposit. Say, let me ring you up and invite you to a real dinner next week."

He shook hands again, violently, with Patricia and the Saint, caught up his panama, and vomited out of the room again like a human whirligig.

In the vestibule a podgy and pompous little man with bushy moustachios was waiting for him. He seized James G. Amberson by the arm. "Did you get it, Jim?"

"You bet I did!" Amberson exhibited his purchase. His excessively American speech had disappeared. "And now d'you mind telling me why we've bought it? I'm just packing up for our getaway when you rush me over here to spend fifteen thousand dollars—"

"I'll tell you how it was, Jim," said the other rapidly. "I'm sitting on top of a bus, and there's a man and a girl in front of me. The first thing I heard was 'Twenty thousand pounds' worth of black pearls in a brass Buddha.' I just had to listen. This chap seemed to be a solicitor's clerk, and he was telling his girl about an old miser who shoved these pearls into a brass Buddha after his wife had died, and nobody found the letter where he said what he'd done till long after he was buried. 'And we've got to try and trace the thing,' says this young chap. 'It was sold to a junk

dealer with a lot of other stuff, and heaven knows where it may be now.' How d'you know you've got it when you find it? says the girl. 'Easy,' says this chap. 'It's got a mark on it like this.' He drew it on his paper, and I nearly broke my neck getting a look. Come on, now—let's get it home and open it."

"I hope Ambrose and James G. are having lots of fun looking for your black pearls, Peter," drawled the Saint piously, as he stood at the counter of Thomas Cook and watched American bills translating themselves into English bank notes with a fluency that was all the heart could desire.

WOMEN NOT WANTED?

ACCORDING to the latest census figures, there are 3,501 members of the so-called weaker sex working as policewomen, detectives, intelligence agents or investigators. Less than five hundred of these women work for the Federal Government, and this includes the 275 girls in Intelligence (G-2) with the armed services.

The Central Intelligence Agency admits it *has* "some women intelligence agents who work overseas," but why aren't there—asked a recent Survey—female FBI agents, T-women or women Secret Service Agents working here in the States?

An FBI spokesman puts it this way—"It's due to the pretty widespread type of investigative jurisdiction that our agents have, which in some cases encompasses elements of danger and arduousness." The Treasury Department puts it a little more plainly—"the over-all job is too dangerous and rough."

And that's apparently that.

In the Inspection Division of the Post Office Department, and over in Treasury's Narcotics Unit, the Alcohol and Tobacco Tax Division, the Coast Guard, Customs and the Secret Service, it's all admitted that it would be desirable—*but*. . . . It's true that 50 of the 11,000 tax collection agents in the Internal Revenue Service are women, but it's pointed out gently that they do *not* take part in some of the more interesting raids. And while it's true that close to five hundred women do work for the Federal Government, as we said, these women agents do not (Dick Tracy and assorted other authorities to the contrary) get too close to the shooting. They do what is called "intelligence research or intelligence analysis." The men handle the guns.

Under-secretary of Welfare Bertha Adkins *may* have hit on the real reason for this protective attitude in a speech during "Ladies Night" at the U. S. Naval Gun Factory, when she pointed out—"Women, after all, are *not* out to take over the running of the Government. We just want to give men a helping hand."

We have seen no comment on this from the agencies we mention.

the death ring of sneferu

by . . . Sax Rohmer

Another story about Abu Tabah —that mysterious learned man who knows the Secret Egypt so well — whom that Egypt fears.

THE orchestra had just ceased playing; and, taking advantage of the lull in the music, my companion leaned confidentially forward, shooting suspicious glances all around him, although there was nothing about the well-dressed after-dinner throng filling Shepheard's that night to have aroused misgiving in the mind of a cinema anarchist.

"I have a very big thing in view," he said, speaking in a husky whisper. "I shall be one up on you, Kernaby, if I pull it off."

He glanced sideways, in the manner of a pantomime brigand, at a party of New York tourists, our immediate neighbors, and from them to an elderly peer with whom I was slightly acquainted and who, in addition to his being stone deaf, had never noticed anything in his life, much less attempted so fatiguing an operation as intrigue.

"Indeed," I commented; and rang the bell with the purpose in view of ordering another cooling beverage.

True, I might be the Egyptian representative of a Birmingham commercial enterprise, but I did

It has been said that Sax Rohmer has contributed more to the folklore of our times than any other living writer in this field. True, but this has obscured the fact that he is also the author of several important novels about a Near East considerably different from that we read about these days.

From: TALES OF SECRET EGYPT, by Sax Rohmer.
Reprinted by permission of Paul R. Reynolds & Son.

not gladly suffer the society of this individual, whose only claim to my acquaintance lay in the fact that he was in the employ of a rival house. My lack of interest palpably disappointed him; but I thought little of the man's qualities as a connoisseur and less of his company. His name was Theo Bishop and I fancy that his family was associated with the tanning industry. I have since thought more kindly of poor Bishop, but at the time of which I write nothing could have pleased me better than his sudden dissolution.

Perhaps unconsciously I had allowed my boredom to become rudely apparent; for Bishop slightly turned his head aside, and—

"Right-o, Kernaby," he said; "I know you think I am an ass, so we will say no more about it. Another cocktail?"

And now I became conscience-stricken; for mingled with the disappointment in Bishop's tone and manner was another note. Vaguely it occurred to me that the man was yearning for sympathy of some kind, that he was bursting to unbosom himself, and that the vanity of a successful rival was by no means wholly responsible. I have since placed that ambiguous note and recognized it for a note of tragedy. But at the time I was deaf to its pleading.

We chatted then for some while longer on indifferent topics, Bishop being, as I have indicated, a man difficult to offend; when, having correspondence to deal with, I retired to my own room. I suppose I had been writing for about an hour, when a servant came to announce a caller. Taking an ordinary visiting-card from the brass salver, I read—

Abu Tabah

No title preceded the name, no address followed, but I became aware of something very like a nervous thrill as I stared at the name of my visitor. Personality is one of the profoundest mysteries of our being. Of the person whose card I held in my hand I knew little, practically nothing; his actions, if at times irregular, had never been wantonly violent; his manner was gentle as that of a mother to a baby and his singular reputation among the natives I thought I could afford to ignore; for the Egyptian, like the Celt, with all his natural endowments, is yet a child at heart. Therefore I cannot explain why, sitting there in my room in Shepheard's Hotel, I knew and recognized, at the name of Abu Tabâh, the touch of fear.

"I will see him downstairs," I said.

Then, as the servant was about to depart, recognizing that I had made a concession to that strange sentiment which the Imám Abu Tabâh had somehow inspired in me—

"No," I added; "show him up here to my room."

A few moments later the man returned again, carrying the brass salver, upon which lay a sealed envelope. I took it up in surprise, noting that it was one belonging to the hotel, and, ere opening it—

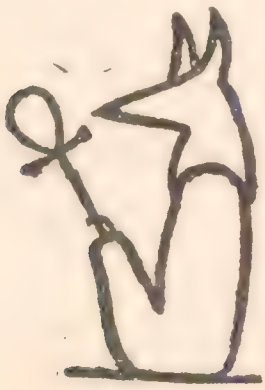
"Where is my visitor?" I said in Arabic.

"He regrets that he cannot stay," replied the man; "but he sends you this letter."

Greatly mystified, I dismissed the servant and tore open the envelope. Inside, upon a sheet of hotel notepaper I found this remarkable message—

Kernaby Pasha—

There are reasons why I cannot stay to see you personally, but I would have you believe that this warning is dictated by nothing but friendship. Grave peril threatens. It is associated with the hieroglyphic—



If you would avert it, and if you value your life, avoid all contact with anything bearing this figure.

Abu Tabâh.

The mystery deepened. There had been something incongruous about the modern European visiting-card used by this representative of Islam, this living illustration of the *Arabian Nights;* now, his incomprehensible "warning" plunged me back again into the mediæval Orient to which he properly belonged. Yet I knew Abu Tabâh, for all his romantic aspect, to be eminently practical, and I could not credit him with descending to the methods of melodrama.

As I studied the precise wording of the note, I seemed to see the slim figure of its author before me, black-robed, white-turbaned, and urbane, his delicate ivory hands crossed and resting upon the head of the ebony cane without which I had never seen him. Almost, I succumbed to a sort of subjective hallucination; Abu Tabâh became a veritable presence, and the poetic beauty of his face struck me anew, as, fixing upon me his eyes, which were like the eyes of a gazelle, he spoke the strange words cited above, in the pure and polished English which he held at command, and described in the air, with a long nervous forefinger, the queer device which symbolized the Ancient Egyptian god, Set, the Destroyer.

Of course, it was the aura of a powerful personality, clinging even to the written message; but there was something about the impression made upon me which

argued for the writer's sincerity.

That Abu Tabâh was some kind of agent, recognized—at any rate unofficially—by the authorities, I knew or shrewdly surmised; but the exact nature of his activities, and how he reconciled them with his religious duties, remained profoundly mysterious. The episode had rendered further work impossible, and I descended to the terrace, with no more definite object in view than that of finding a quiet corner where I might meditate in the congenial society of my briar, and at the same time seek inspiration from the ever-changing throng in the Shâria Kâmel Pasha.

I had scarcely set my foot upon the terrace, however, ere a hand was laid upon my arm. Turning quickly I recognized, in the dusk, Hassan es-Sugra, for many years a trusted employee of the British Archæological Society.

His demeanor was at once excited and furtive, and I recognized with something akin to amazement that he, also, had a story to unfold. I mentally catalogued this eventful evening "the night of strange confidences."

Seated at a little table on the deserted balcony (for the evening was very chilly) and directly facing the shop of Philip, the dealer in Arab woodwork, Hassan es-Sugra told his wonder tale; and as he told it I knew that Fate had cast me, willy-nilly, for a part in some comedy upon which the curtain had already risen here in Cairo, and whereof the second act should be played in perhaps the most ancient setting which the hand of man has builded. As the narrative unrolled itself before me, I perceived wheels within wheels; I was wholly absorbed, yet half incredulous.

". . . When the professor abandoned work on the pyramid, Kernaby Pasha," he said, bending eagerly forward and laying his muscular brown hand upon my sleeve, "it was not because there was no more to learn there."

"I am aware of this, O Hassan," I interrupted, "it was in order that they might carry on the work at the Pyramid of Illahun, which resulted in a find of jewelry almost unique in the annals of Egyptology."

"Do I not know all this!" exclaimed Hassan impatiently; "and was not mine the hand that uncovered the golden uræus? But the work projected at the Pyramid of Méydum was never completed, and I can tell you why."

I stared at him through the gloom; for I had already some idea respecting the truth of this matter.

"It was that the men, over two hundred of them, refused to enter the passage again," he whispered dramatically, "it was because misfortune and disaster visited more than one who had penetrated to a certain place therein." He bent further forward. "The Pyramid of

Méydum is the home of a powerful *Efreet,* Kernaby Pasha! But I who was the last to leave it, know what is concealed there. In a certain place, low down in the corner of the King's Chamber, is a ring of gold, bearing a cartouche. It is the royal ring of the Pharaoh who built the pyramid."

He ceased, watching me intently. I did not doubt Hassan's word, for I had always counted him a man of integrity; but there was much that was obscure and much that was mysterious in his story.

"Why did you not bring it away?" I asked.

"I feared to touch it, Kernaby Pasha; it is an evil talisman. Until today I have feared to speak of it."

"And today?"

Hassan extended his hands, palms upward.

"I am threatened with the loss of my house," he said simply, "if I do not find a certain sum of money within a period of twelve days."

I sat resting my chin on my hand and staring into the face of Hassan es-Sugra. Could it be that from superstitious motives such a treasure had indeed been abandoned? Could it be that Fate had delivered into my hands a relic so priceless as the signet-ring of Sneferu, one of the earliest Memphite Pharaohs? Since I had recently incurred the displeasure of my principals, Messrs. Moses, Murphy & Co., of Birmingham, the mere anticipation of such a "find" was sufficient to raise my professional enthusiasm to white heat, and in those few moments of silence I had decided upon instant action.

"Meet me at Rikka Station, tomorrow morning at nine o'clock," I said, "and arrange for donkeys to carry us to the pyramid."

On my arrival at Rikka, and therefore at the very outset of my inquiry, I met with what one slightly prone to superstition might have regarded as an unfortunate omen. A native funeral was passing out of the town amid the wailing of women and the chanting by the *Yemeneeyeh,* of the Profession of the Faith, with its queer monotonous cadences, a performance which despite its familiarity in the Near East never failed to affect me unpleasantly. By the token of the *tarbush* upon the bier, I knew that this was a man who was being hurried to his lonely resting-place on the fringe of the desert.

As the procession wound its way out across the sands, I saw to the removal of my baggage and joined Hassan es-Sugra, who awaited me by the wooden barrier. I perceived immediately that something was wrong with the man; he was palpably laboring under the influence of some strong excitement, and his dark eyes regarded me almost fearfully. He was muttering to himself like one suffering from an over-indulgence

in *Hashish,* and I detected the words *"Allahu akbar!"* (God is most great) several times repeated.

"What ails you, Hassan, my friend?" I said; and noting how his gaze persistently returned to the melancholy procession wending its way towards the little Moslem cemetery:—"Was the dead man some relation of yours?"

"No, no, Kernaby Pasha," he muttered gutturally, and moistened his lips with his tongue; "I was but slightly acquainted with him."

"Yet you are much disturbed."

"Not at all, Kernaby Pasha," he assured me; "not in the slightest."

By which familiar formula I knew that Hassan es-Sugra would conceal from me the cause of his distress, and therefore, since I had no appetite for further mysteries, I determined to learn it from another source.

"See to the loading of the donkey," I directed him—for three sleek little animals were standing beside him, patiently awaiting the toil of the day.

Hassan setting about the task with a cheerful alacrity obviously artificial, I approached the native station master, with whom I was acquainted, and put to him a number of questions respecting his important functions—in which I was not even mildly interested. But to the Oriental mind a direct inquiry is an affront, almost an insult; and to have inquired bluntly the name of the deceased and the manner of his death would have been the best way to have learned nothing whatever about the matter. Therefore having discussed in detail the slothful incompetence of Arab ticket collectors and the lazy condition and innate viciousness of Egyptian porters as a class, I mentioned incidentally that I had observed a funeral leaving Rikka.

The station master (who was bursting to talk about this very matter, but who would have declined on principle to do so had I definitely questioned him) now unfolded to me the strange particulars respecting the death of one, Ahmed Abdulla, who had been a retired dragoman though some time employed as an excavator.

"He rode out one night upon his white donkey," said my informant, "and no man knows whither he went. But it is believed, Kernaby Pasha, that it was to the Haram el-Kaddâb" (the False Pyramid)—extending his hand to where, beyond the belt of fertility, the tomb of Sneferu up-reared its three platforms from the fringe of the desert. "To enter the pyramid even in daytime is to court misfortune; to enter at night is to fall into the hands of the powerful *Efreet* who dwells there. His donkey returned without him, and therefore search was made for Ahmed Abdulla. He was found the next day"—again the long

arm shot out towards the desert—"dead upon the sands, near the foot of the pyramid."

I looked into the face of the speaker; beyond doubt he was in deadly earnest.

"Why should Ahmed Abdulla have wanted to visit such a place at night?" I asked.

My acquaintance lowered his voice, muttered *"Sahâm Allah fee 'adoo ed—dîn!"* (May God transfix the enemies of the religion) and touched his forehead, his mouth, and his breast with the iron ring which he wore.

"There is a great treasure concealed there, Kernaby Pasha," he replied; "a treasure hidden from the world in the days of Suleyman the Great, sealed with his seal, and guarded by the servants of Gánn Ibn-Gánn."

"So you think the guardian *ginn* killed Ahmed Abdulla?"

The station master muttered invocations, and—

"There are things which may not be spoken of," he said; "but those who saw him dead say that he was terrible to look upon. A great *Welee,* a man of wisdom famed throughout Egypt, has been summoned to avert the evil; for if the anger of the *ginn* is aroused they may visit the most painful and unfortunate penalties upon all Rikka. . . ."

Half an hour later I set out, having confidentially informed the station master that I sought to obtain a fine turquoise necklet which I knew to be in the possession of the Sheikh of Méydum. Little did I suspect how it was written that I should indeed visit the house of the venerable Sheikh. Out through the fields of young green corn, the palm groves and the sycamore orchards I rode, Hassan plodding silently behind me and leading the donkey who bore the baggage. Curious eyes watched our passage, from field, doorway, and *shaduf;* but nothing of note marked our journey save the tremendous heat of the sun at noon, beneath which I knew myself a fool to travel.

I camped on the western side of the pyramid, but well clear of the marshes, which are the home of countless wild-fowl. I had no idea how long it would take me to extract the coveted ring from its hiding-place (which Hassan had closely described to me); and, remembering the speculative glances of the villagers, I had no intention of exposing myself against the face of the pyramid until dusk should have come to cloak my operations.

Hassan es-Sugra, whose new taciturnity was remarkable and whose behavior was distinguished by an odd disquiet, set out with his gun to procure our dinner, and I mounted the sandy slope on the southwest of the pyramid, where from my cover behind a mound of rubbish, I studied through my field glasses the belt of vegetation marking the course of the Nile. I

could detect no sign of surveillance, but in view of the fact that the smuggling of relics out of Egypt is a punishable offense my caution was dictated by wisdom.

We dined excellently, Hassan the Silent and I, upon quail, tinned tomatoes, fresh dates, bread, and Vichy-water (to which in my own case was added a stiff three fingers of whiskey).

When the newly risen moon cast an ebon shadow of the Pyramid of Sneferu upon the carpet of the sands, I made my way around the angle of the ancient building towards the mound on the northern side whereby one approaches the entrance. Three paces from the shadow's edge, I paused, transfixed, because of that which confronted me.

Outlined against the moon-bright sky upon a ridge of the desert behind and to the north of the great structure, stood the motionless figure of a man!

For a moment I thought that my mind had conjured up this phantasmal watcher, that he was a thing of moon-magic and not of flesh and blood. But as I stood regarding him, he moved, seemed to raise his head, then turned and disappeared beyond the crest.

How long I remained staring at the spot where he had been I know not; but I was aroused from my useless contemplation by the jingling of camel bells. The sound came from behind me, stealing sweetly through the stillness from a great distance. I turned in a flash, whipped out my glasses and searched the remote fringe of the Fáyum. Stately across the jeweled curtain of the night moved a caravan, blackly marked against that wondrous background. Three walking figures I counted, three laden donkeys, and two camels. Upon the first of the camels a man was mounted, upon the second was a *shibreeyeh,* a sort of covered litter, which I knew must conceal a woman. The caravan passed out of sight into the palm grove which conceals the village of Méydum.

I returned my glasses to their case, and stood for some moments deep in reflection; then I descended the slope, to the tiny encampment where I had left Hassan es-Sugra. He was nowhere to be seen; and having waited some ten minutes I grew impatient, and raising my voice:

"Hassan!" I cried; "Hassan es-Sugra!"

No answer greeted me, although in the desert stillness the call must have been audible for miles. A second and a third time I called his name . . . and the only reply was the shrill note of a pyramid bat that swooped low above my head; the vast solitude of the sands swallowed up my voice and the walls of the Tomb of Sneferu mocked me with their echo, crying eerily:

"Hassan! Hassan es-Sugra . . . Hassan! . . ."

This mysterious episode affected me unpleasantly, but did not divert me from my purpose: I succeeded in casting out certain demons of superstition who had sought to lay hold upon me; and a prolonged scrutiny of the surrounding desert somewhat allayed my fears of human surveillance. For my visit to the chamber in the heart of the ancient building I had arrayed myself in rubber-soled shoes, an old pair of drill trousers, and a pajama jacket. A Colt repeater was in my hip pocket, and, in addition to several instruments which I thought might be useful in extracting the ring from its setting, I carried a powerful electric torch.

Seated on the threshold of the entrance, fifty feet above the desert level, I cast a final glance backwards towards the Nile valley, then, the lighted torch carried in my jacket pocket, I commenced the descent of the narrow, sloping passage. Periodically, when some cranny between the blocks offered a foothold, I checked my progress, and inspected the steep path below for snake tracks.

Some two hundred and forty feet of labored descent discovered me in a sort of shallow cavern little more than a yard high and partly hewn out of the living rock which formed the foundation of the pyramid. In this place I found the heat to be almost insufferable, and the smell of remote mortality which assailed my nostrils from the sand-strewn floor threatened to choke me. For five minutes or more I lay there, bathed in perspiration, my nerves at high tension, listening for the slightest sound within or without. I cannot pretend that I was entirely master of myself. The stuff that fear is made of seemed to rise from the ancient dust; and I had little relish for the second part of my journey, which lay through a long horizontal passage rarely exceeding fourteen inches in height. The mere memory of that final crawl of forty feet or so is sufficient to cause me to perspire profusely; therefore let it suffice that I reached the end of the second passage, and breathing with difficulty the deathful, poisonous atmosphere of the place, found myself at the foot of the rugged shaft which gives access to the King's Chamber. Resting my torch upon a convenient ledge, I climbed up, and knew myself to be in one of the oldest chambers fashioned by human handiwork.

The journey had been most exhausting, but, allowing myself only a few moments' rest, I crossed to the eastern corner of the place and directed a ray of light upon the crevice which, from Hassan's description, I believed to conceal the ring. His account having been detailed, I experienced little difficulty in finding the cavity; but in the very moment of success the light of the torch grew dim . . . and I recognized with a

mingling of chagrin and fear that it was burnt out and that I had no means of recharging it.

Ere the light expired, I had time to realize two things: that the cavity was empty . . . and that someone or something was approaching the foot of the shaft along the horizontal passage below!

Strictly though I have schooled my emotions, my heart was beating in a most uncomfortable fashion as, crouching near the edge of the shaft, I watched the red glow fade from the delicate filament of the lamp. Retreat was impossible; there is but one entrance to the pyramid; and the darkness which now descended upon me was indescribable; it possessed horrific qualities; it seemed palpably to enfold me like the wings of some monstrous bat. The air of the King's Chamber I found to be almost unbearable, and it was no steady hand with which I gripped my pistol.

The sounds of approach continued. The suspense was becoming intolerable—when, into the Memphian gloom below me, there suddenly intruded a faint but ever-growing light. Between excitement and insufficient air, I regarded suffocation as imminent. Then, out into view beneath me, was thrust a slim ivory hand which held an electric pocket lamp. Fascinatedly I watched it, saw it joined by its fellow, then observed a white-turbaned head and a pair of black-robed shoulders follow. In my surprise I almost dropped the weapon which I held. The new arrival now standing upright and raising his head, I found myself looking into the face of *Abu Tabâh!*

"To Allah, the Great, the Compassionate, be all praise that I have found you alive," he said simply.

He exhibited little evidence of the journey which I had found so fatiguing, but an expression strongly like that of real anxiety rested upon his ascetic face.

"If life is dear to you," he continued, "answer me this, Kernaby Pasha; have you found the ring?"

"I have not," I replied; "my lamp failed me; but I think the ring is gone."

And now, as I spoke the words, the strangeness of his question came home to me, bringing with it an acute suspicion.

"What do you know of this ring, O my friend?" I asked.

Abu Tabâh shrugged his shoulders.

"I know much that is evil," he replied; "and because you doubt the purity of my motives, all that I have learned you shall learn also; for Allah the Great, the Merciful, this night has protected you from danger and spared you a frightful death. Follow me, Kernaby Pasha, in order that these things may be made manifest to you."

A pair of fleet camels were kneeling at the foot of the slope below the entrance to the pyramid, and having recovered somewhat from the effect of the fatiguing climb out from the King's Chamber—

"It might be desirable," I said, "that I adopt a more suitable raiment for camel riding?"

Abu Tabâh slowly shook his head in that dignified manner which never deserted him. He had again taken up his ebony walking-stick and was now resting his crossed hands upon it and regarding me with his strange, melancholy eyes.

"To delay would be unwise," he replied. "You have mercifully been spared a painful and unfortunate end (all praise to Him who averted the peril); but the ring, which bears an ancient curse, is gone: for me there is no rest until I have found and destroyed it."

He spoke with a solemn conviction which bore the seal of verity.

"Your destructive theory may be perfectly sound," I said; "but as one professionally interested in relics of the past, I feel called upon to protest. Perhaps before we proceed any further you will enlighten me respecting this most obscure matter. Can you inform me, for example, what became of Hassan es-Sugra?"

"He observed my approach from a distance, and fled, being a man of little virtue. Respecting the other matters you shall be fully enlightened, tonight. The white camel is for you."

There was a gentle finality in his manner to which I succumbed. My feelings towards this mysterious being had undergone a slight change; and whilst I cannot truthfully say that I loved him as a brother, a certain respect for Abu Tabâh was taking possession of my mind. I began to understand his reputation with the natives; beyond doubt his uncanny wisdom was impressive; his lofty dignity awed. And no man is at his best arrayed in canvas shoes, very dirty drill trousers, and a pajama jacket.

As I had anticipated, the village of Méydum proved to be our destination, and the gait of the magnificent creatures upon which we were mounted was exhausting. I shall always remember that moonlight ride across the desert to the palm groves of Méydum.

In a *mandarah,* part of it inlaid with fine mosaic and boasting a pretty fountain, I was presented to the imposing old man who was evidently the host of Abu Tabâh. Ere taking my seat upon the *dîwan,* I shed my canvas shoes, in accordance with custom, accepted a pipe and a cup of excellent coffee, and awaited with much curiosity the next development. A brief colloquy between Abu Tabâh and the Sheikh, at the further end of the apartment resulted in the disappearance of the

Sheikh and the approach of my mysterious friend.

"Because, although you are not a Moslem, you are a man of culture and understanding," said Abu Tabâh, "I have ordered that my sister shall be brought into your presence."

"That is exceedingly good of you," I said, but indeed I knew it to be an honor which spoke volumes at once for Abu Tabâh's enlightenment and good opinion of myself.

"She is a virgin of great beauty," he continued; "and the excellence of her mind exceeds the perfection of her person."

"I congratulate you," I answered politely, "upon the possession of a sister in every way so desirable."

Abu Tabâh inclined his head in a characteristic gesture of gentle courtesy.

"Allah has indeed blessed my house," he admitted; "and because your mind is filled with conjectures respecting the source of certain information which you know me to possess, I desire that the matter shall be made clear to you."

How I should have answered this singular man I know not; but as he spoke the words, into the *mandarah* came the Sheikh, followed by a girl robed and veiled entirely in white. With gait slow and graceful she approached the *dîwan*. She wore a white *yelek* so closely wrapped about her that it concealed the rest of her attire, and a white *tarbar*, or head-veil, decorated with gold embroidery, almost entirely concealed her hair, save for one jet-black plait in which little gold ornaments were entwined and which hung down on the left of her forehead. A white *yashmak* reached nearly to her feet, which were clad in little red leather slippers.

As she approached me I was impressed, not so much with the details of her white attire, nor with the fine lines of a graceful figure which the gossamer robe quite failed to conceal, but with her wonderful gazelle-like eyes, which were uncannily like those of her brother.

No form of introduction was observed; with modestly lowered eyes the girl saluted me and took her seat upon a heap of cushions before a small coffee table set at one end of the *dîwan*. The Sheikh seated himself beside me, and Abu Tabâh, with a reed pen, wrote something rapidly on a narrow strip of paper. The Sheikh clapped his hands, a man entered bearing a brazier containing live charcoal, and, having placed it upon the floor, immediately withdrew. The *dîwan* was lighted by a lantern swung from the ceiling, and its light, pouring fully down upon the white figure of the girl, and leaving the other persons and objects in comparative shadow, produced a picture which I am unlikely to forget.

Amid a tense silence, Abu Ta-

bâh took from a box upon the table some resinous substance. This he sprinkled upon the fire in the brazier; and the girl extending a small hand and round soft arm across the table, he again dipped his pen in the ink and drew upon the upturned palm a rough square which he divided into nine parts, writing in each an Arabic figure. Finally, in the center he poured a small drop of ink, upon which, in response to words rapidly spoken, the girl fixed an intent gaze.

Into the brazier Abu Tabâh dropped one by one fragments of the paper upon which he had written what I presumed to be a form of invocation. Immediately, standing between the smoking brazier and the girl, he commenced a subdued muttering. I recognized that I was about to be treated to an exhibition of *darb el-mendel;* Abu Tabâh being evidently a *sahhar,* or adept in the art called *er-roohânee.* Save for this indistinct muttering, no other sound disturbed the silence of the apartment, until suddenly the girl began to speak Arabic and in a sweet but monotonous voice.

"Again I see the ring," she said, "a hand is holding it before me. The ring bears a green scarab, upon which is written the name of a king of Egypt. . . . The ring is gone. I can see it no more. No more."

"Seek it," directed Abu Tabâh in a low voice, and threw more incense upon the fire. "Are you seeking it?"

"Yes," replied the girl, who now began to tremble violently, "I am in a low passage which slopes downwards so steeply that I am afraid."

"Fear nothing," said Abu Tabâh; "follow the passage."

With marvelous fidelity the girl described the passage and the shaft leading to the King's Chamber in the Pyramid of Méydum. She described the cavity in the wall where once (if Hassan es-Sugra was worthy of credence) the ring had been concealed.

"There is a freshly made hole in the stonework," she said. "The picture has gone; I am standing in some dark place and the same hand again holds the ring before me."

"Is it the hand of an Oriental," asked Abu Tabâh, "or of a European?"

"It is the hand of a European. It has disappeared; I see a funeral procession winding out from Rikka into the desert."

"Follow the ring," directed Abu Tabâh, a queer, compelling note in his voice.

Again he sprinkled perfume upon the fire and—

"I see a Pharaoh upon his throne," continued the monotonous voice, "upon the first finger of his left hand he wears the ring with the green scarab. A prisoner stands before him in chains; a woman pleads with the king, but

he is deaf to her. He draws the ring from his finger and hands it to one standing behind the throne —one who has a very evil face. Ah . . ."

The girl's voice died away in a low wail of fear or horror. But—

"What do you see?" demanded Abu Tabâh.

"The death-ring of Pharaoh!" whispered the soft voice tremulously; "it is the death-ring!"

"Return from the past to the present," ordered Abu Tabâh. "Where is the ring now?"

He continued his weird muttering, whilst the girl, who still shuddered violently, peered again into the pool of ink. Suddenly—

"I see a long line of dead men," she whispered, speaking in a kind of chant; "they are of all the races of the East, and some are swathed in mummy wrappings; the wrappings are sealed with the death-ring of Pharaoh. They are passing me slowly, on their way across the desert from the Pyramid of Méydum to a narrow ravine where a tent is erected. They go to summon one who is about to join their company. . . ."

I suppose the suffocating perfume of the burning incense was chiefly responsible, but at this point I realized that I was becoming dizzy and that immediate departure into a cooler atmosphere was imperative. Quietly, in order to avoid disturbing the séance, I left the *mandarah*. So absorbed were the three in their weird performance that my departure was apparently unnoticed. Out in the coolness of the palm grove I soon recovered. I doubt if I possess the temperament which enables one to contemplate with equanimity a number of dead men promenading in their shrouds.

"The truth is now wholly made manifest," said Abu Tabâh; "the revelation is complete."

Once more I was mounted upon the white camel and the mysterious *imám* rode beside me upon its fellow, which was of less remarkable color.

"I hear your words," I replied.

"The poor Ahmed Abdulla," he continued, "who was of little wisdom, knew, as Hassan es-Sugra knew, of the hidden ring; for he was one of those who fled from the pyramid refusing to enter it again. Greed spoke to him, however, and he revealed the secret to a certain Englishman, called Bishop, contracting to aid him in recovering the ring."

At last enlightenment was mine . . . and it brought in its train a dreadful premonition.

"Something I knew of the peril," said Abu Tabâh, "but not, at first, all. The Englishman I warned, but he neglected my warning. Already Ahmed Abdulla was dead, having been dispatched by his employer to the pyramid; and the people of Rikka had sent for me. Now, by means

known to you, I learned that evil powers threatened your life also, in what form I knew not at that time save that the sign of Set had been revealed to me in conjunction with your death."

"That the secret of the pyramid was a Pharaoh's ring I did not learn until later; but now it is manifest that the thing of power is the death-ring of Sneferu. . . ."

The huge bulk of the Pyramid of Méydum loomed above us as he spoke the words, for we were nearly come to our destination; and its proximity occasioned within me a physical chill. I do not think an open check for a thousand pounds would have tempted me to enter the place again. The death-ring of Sneferu possessed uncomfortable and supernatural properties. So far as I was aware, no example of such a ring (the *lettre de cachet* of the period) was included in any known collection. One dating much after Sneferu, and bearing the cartouche of Apepi II (one of the Hyksos, or Shepherd Kings) came to light late in the nineteenth century; it was reported to be the ring which, traditionally, Joseph wore as emblematical of the power vested in him by Pharaoh. Sir Gaston Maspero and other authorities considered it to be a forgery and it vanished from the ken of connoisseurs. I never learned by what firm it was manufactured.

A mile to the west of the pyramid we found Theo Bishop's encampment. I thought it to be deserted—until I entered the little tent. . . .

An oil-lamp stood upon a wooden box; and its rays made yellow the face of the man stretched upon the camp-bed. My premonition was realized; Bishop must have entered the pyramid less than an hour ahead of me; he it was who had stood upon the mound, silhouetted against the sky, when I had first approached the slope. He had met with the fate of Ahmed Abdulla.

He had been dead for at least two hours, and by the token of certain hideous glandular swellings, I knew that he had met his end by the bite of an Egyptian viper.

"Abu Tabâh!" I cried, my voice hoarsely unnatural—"the recess in the King's Chamber is a viper's nest!"

"You speak wisdom, Kernaby Pasha; the viper is the servant of the *ginn.*"

Upon the third finger of his swollen right hand Bishop wore the ring of ghastly history; and the mysterious significance of the Sign of Set became apparent. For added to the usual cartouche of the Pharaoh was the symbol of the god of destruction.

We buried him deeply, piling stones upon the grave, that the jackals of the desert might never disturb the last holder of the death-ring of Sneferu.

drop of green fire

by . . . Stuart Palmer

There was pleading in his voice. She mustn't go, he said thickly. He wanted to explain about the walls . . .

FEW and far between were the passers-by on Manhattan's Fifty-seventh Street that rainy Saturday afternoon, but still not few enough for the purpose of the man in the tan raincoat. He loitered until the glint of brass buttons had disappeared inside the cigar store on the corner, and then pulled his hat over his eyes and strolled casually toward the glittering windows of VANDERBOCK ET CIE., JEWELERS, FOUNDED PARIS 1890.

He paused there briefly, and then passed hurriedly on, leaving behind him one neatly-wrapped brick, one smashed plate-glass window, and no diamonds.

As the burglar alarms let go with a nerve-paralyzing clatter, the man in the raincoat ran out into the street and leaped lightly to the side of a small shiny roadster which happened to be rolling conveniently along there, driven by what was later described as "a blonde dame with sun-glasses." The roadster picked up speed, but then from the cigar store on the corner rushed a uni-

Everybody knows Hildegarde Withers, the school-teacher detective and bane of Inspector Oscar Piper's existence, portrayed on the screen at various times by Edna Mae Oliver, Zasu Pitts and others. The heroine of adventures such as "The Riddle of the Hungry Hippo," "The Riddle of the Forty Naughty Girls," etc., makes her first appearance in The Saint *with the present story.*

Originally published as GREEN ICE in the *Chicago Tribune*, April 13, 1941. Copyright 1941 by Stuart Palmer. Reprinted by permission of Scott Meredith Literary Agency, Inc.

formed officer, shouting "Halt!" and fumbling with the catch of his holster. There was the sharp dry slap of a pistol shot. Brass buttons collapsed on the wet pavement, and with a screech of tortured rubber the car rounded the corner and disappeared north toward the park.

The burglar alarms continued, and then the wail of sirens swelled the ear-splitting din. A radio car slammed on its brakes beside the crumpled figure in the gutter, but the doctor who jumped down out of the following ambulance shook his head and said "Dead on arrival."

Humanity appeared in considerable numbers, blocking the street and trampling in the broken glass outside the jewelers' window. Precinct detectives were very busy, and then stood back as a sharp-nosed lieutenant from Uptown Robbery Detail took charge. And finally nothing less than a big black limousine from Headquarters appeared, from which climbed a wiry, gray little Irishman with a gold badge cupped in his right hand. The murder of a police officer in the line of duty is taken very seriously by the force.

The lieutenant, who had been staring gloomily into the looted window, now turned and saluted. "Grosskopf, lieutenant — Robbery Detail," he introduced himself.

"Inspector Piper. And Sergeant Mains," said the man from downtown, waving at the curly-headed but extremely serious youngster who had driven the car. "We're only kibitzing, Lieutenant. Go right ahead."

"It's simple smash-and-grab," the lieutenant said. "Like the other cases we've been having. Only this time old Sam Bodley had to get blasted as they were making their getaway."

"Someday these jewelers will learn to use safety glass," Piper observed. "Any witnesses?"

Lieutenant Grosskopf shrugged, and pointed inside the store. "There's the doorman at Carnegie, and a dame," he said, making it clear that he was unimpressed with the showing. The inspector moved toward the door, and then winced as a clear and familiar feminine voice sounded above the noise of the crowd.

"Yoo hoo! Oscar!"

The inspector turned, as if to seek shelter, but it was too late. Pushing through the ranks of the curious, ducking beneath the rope barrier to the detriment of her somewhat amazing hat, came a lean, angular lady brandishing a black-cotton umbrella. "Oscar, I simply *must* tell you—"

"Oh, it's you!" muttered the inspector, without enthusiasm, as he turned to face Miss Hildegarde Withers. "You know, someday I'm going to smash that radio of yours, so help me."

"I wasn't listening in on your old police calls," snapped the maiden schoolteacher indignantly. "I was right here in the neighborhood, shopping for an apartment, and I heard the sirens—"

"All right, all right," he told her. "Run along." Lieutenant Grosskopf now interrupted, bearing a brick partially wrapped in white tissue paper, with festive red string and gilt stickers. "That's what the guy used, eh?" Piper took the brick, hefted it, and then handed it into the custody of the handsome young sergeant, in spite of Miss Withers' obvious interest. "Stop trying to act like a detective, Hildegarde," Piper went on. "There's no tracing a used brick."

He passed on inside the jewelry store, intent upon finding the witnesses to the crime. The sergeant followed, with notebook in readiness, and Miss Withers, trying to look as much like the Invisible Man as possible, tagged along.

There wasn't too much to be got from the witnesses. John Asch, doorman at Carnegie Hall, had heard the alarms and the shot, and had looked down the street in time to glimpse the departing roadster, which he thought was a 1938 Ford coupé. "It all happened so quick!" he complained. "A blonde dame with goggles was driving."

Miss Marcia Lee Smith, who admitted that she was late of Savannah, Georgia, and now in New York to take up the study of the violin, was making the most of her adventure. "I was jus' walking along the street, to save taxi fare, you know, and I heard a great tremendous crash and the alarms and everything. I looked up and there was a man —a great, tall, dark man, sort of foreign-looking—and he ran out into the street and jumped in the car and away they went. Ooh, was I scared!"

Marcia Lee's round young shoulders shivered deliciously to indicate how scared she had been. She was doubtful about the make of the car, but very positive about her description of the bandit. "He was awful tall—taller even than this gentleman heah," she insisted, looking up at Sergeant Mains and letting her lashes fall across her dimpled cheek.

"Okay, folks. Leave your names and addresses with the sarge, and then you can go." Inspector Piper turned away, then suddenly confronted Miss Hildegarde Withers. "Now what are you sleuthing at?" he demanded. "I thought I told you—"

"Nothing, Oscar. Nothing at all," she insisted. Which was mostly true. It had occurred to her that the sergeant ought to be taking Marcia Lee Smith's address and telephone number down in his official notebook instead of in the little red address

book which he had produced from an inner pocket, but that was nobody's business but his own.

The last witness to be interviewed was the Vanderbock in charge of the store, a dapper, narrow-shouldered young man in spats, who had been the only one in the place to have even a fleeting glimpse of the bandit, and who seemed very vague about that.

"I was in the rear of the store with the staff, making plans for the anniversary sale tomorrow," he admitted. "I heard the tinkle of glass, and looked up to see a man—a man with a hat—grabbing things out of the display window. Then he was gone." Vanderbock shrugged. "Anyway, the most valuable piece in the window, a flawless twenty-five-carat emerald ring, was overlooked by the thief. And the diamonds he took were fully insured."

"Funny he left that twenty-five-carat hunk of green ice," said Piper worriedly. "Okay. Make out a complete list and description of the missing stones." He turned. "Hey, Sarge!"

"I'll be glad to take down the list," Miss Withers hastily offered. "The sergeant is busy."

The inspector's temper was short today. "Relax, Hildegarde!" he ordered, gesturing toward the door with his thumb. "Sergeant!"

"But Oscar, I've something—" the maiden schoolteacher tried to continue.

"Later, Hildegarde! Run along now." And the inspector turned his back on her. Miss Withers sniffed, shrugged, and marched toward the door.

"Sergeant, if you're through with the witnesses, will you take down this list of stolen property?" the inspector was saying. Then he was interrupted by a policeman, who brought word that the commissioner was on the phone.

"There it starts!" moaned Oscar Piper. He looked around, thinking fast. "Oh—tell him I've just left." And he started for the door, pausing only long enough to tell the sergeant that he would be at the drugstore up the street, and that no, it would not be necessary to drive Witness Marcia Lee Smith home in the Headquarters limousine.

The inspector caught Miss Withers on the sidewalk, a very ruffled Miss Withers indeed. "Okay, Hildegarde," he apologized. "I'll buy you a cup of coffee to make up for throwing you out. Only it makes us all short-tempered to have anything like this happen. A cop shot down in his tracks—and we don't know a thing about the guy who did it."

"No, Oscar?" Only slightly mollified, Miss Withers sank

down on a stool in the drugstore. "How about the witnesses?"

"Worthless," he told her. "You know yourself that nine witnesses out of ten make up a long story about the tall dark foreign-looking man . . ." She nodded, and he went on. "So we start from nowhere."

"Knowing nothing about the bandit," Miss Withers said thoughtfully as she looked into her coffee cup, "nothing except that he is a man between thirty and forty years of age, about five feet six inches tall, wears a light-tan raincoat and a dark hat, is an experienced crook known to the police, and is new to the jewel racket. And that he is an egomaniac with a twisted sense of humor. That's all?"

The inspector's cup clattered in its saucer. *"What?"*

"Elementary, my dear Oscar. Who else but an egomaniac would wrap the brick as a gift, with HAPPY BIRTHDAY stickers on it, just because it was the jewelry store's fiftieth anniversary? He was an experienced crook because of the neatness and swiftness of the job. Wanted by the police—or else he wouldn't have been desperate enough to shoot his way clear. A first offender asks for mercy and a light sentence. And the bandit is new to the jewel trade, or he wouldn't have missed the big emerald. See?"

Piper nodded slowly. "Shrewd guessing. But the rest of it—his height and age and so on . . ."

"I know that," Miss Withers confessed, "because I *looked*. I came around the corner just as the killer jumped for his car. Oh, don't look at me that way. I tried to tell you. Anyway, no man over forty is spry enough to jump as he jumped. I didn't see his face, or the driver's, because they were headed the other way. But I saw his height, and he was no giant."

"Not bad, Hildegarde, not bad at all," Oscar Piper was forced to confess. "Now if you could work out a trap to catch him . . ."

"Why not an officer in every jewelry store—or staked out across the street?"

Piper shook his head. "They'd scare him off. I don't just want to stop this series of robberies, I want to get the man who shot Sam Bodley. He'll probably strike again—at some one of the big jewelry stores of upper Fifth or Madison or this street." Suddenly the inspector snapped his fingers. "I've got it! The really important jewelry stores are all within a ten-block area. Tiffany's, Black Starr & Gorham and so forth—all of them. Each store has alarm wires to the protective association. We'll reroute those wires straight to the radio dispatcher at Headquarters. Plant men in radio cars, motorcycle units, and stake-outs so that thirty seconds after the next smash-

and-grab alarm we have a police cordon drawn tight around the whole section. Nobody gets out, nobody gets in. We tighten the cordon, search everybody, watch for a known crook or somebody acting suspicious." He grinned. "It's a sort of dragnet."

"Or a grab bag," said the schoolteacher. "There'll be complaints."

"But we'll nab the killer of Sam Bodley." Pleased to think that at last he had something concrete to suggest to the commissioner, Oscar Piper borrowed a nickel from Miss Withers and headed for the nearest phone booth.

He was less pleased next morning when he picked up the paper and read the story beneath the banner head COP KILLER STILL AT LARGE. It was not that the newspaper story was in error. They had everything, from the photograph of old Sam Bodley face-down in the street to an artist's re-creation of the killer, from Marcia Lee Smith's description. They poked fun at the bandit for taking the diamonds and missing the more valuable emerald. But the story ended with a complete explanation of the "dragnet" which the police were planning to try.

His cigar suddenly went stale in his mouth. A lot of good the dragnet would do, with the quarry forewarned. Oscar Piper shook his head. It was the first time his old friend and sparring partner had let him down. So Hildegarde had to go and talk in front of the reporters!

He reached savagely across his desk and tore off the top sheet of his calendar pad, on which he had written *Call Hildegarde re: dinner*. The rest of the day Piper devoted to perfecting the dragnet plan, for lack of a better idea. When, toward five, Miss Withers called on the phone, he sent word that he was tied up.

A rare thing it was for the normally sunny inspector to carry a grudge overnight, but this one grew and flourished. Over his desk was pinned the picture of Sam Bodley lying dead in the gutter, and that didn't help. Nor did his temper take a turn for the better when two days later, dressed in unaccustomed black, he sat in the funeral parlors with a delegation from Headquarters and heard the last prayers for Sam Bodley. During a lull in the ceremony a well-meaning captain—old Judd from Missing Persons—leaned over and whispered, "If you're still stymied on this case, why don't you call in that schoolma'am pal of yours? She was a ball of fire on that last job." Piper nearly bit him.

On Monday, four days after the shattering of the jewelers' window, Miss Withers marched down Fifty-seventh Street again.

She noted in passing that Vanderbock's window was repaired, and that again its glittering treasures tempted the public, even to the big green emerald ring in the center of the display.

But she had other things on her mind besides trying to help a stubborn, pigheaded Irishman out of his muddle. If he wanted to play that way, so be it. She was determined on the business in hand, which was to find an unfurnished apartment within her means and near the Sixth Avenue subway.

There was a remodeled brownstone just around the corner from Fifty-seventh which had caught her eye just before the shriek of the sirens had led her astray the other day. Now she retraced her steps, came up past the neatly lettered sign UNFURNISHED APARTMENTS—NEWLY DECORATED — AGENT ON PREMISES. The door was open, and the lower hall disclosed a jumble of painters' ladders, wallpaper rolls, kegs and tubs and buckets of paint, and all the canvas, plaster, plumbing equipment which could be imagined.

In the midst of all this stood a young girl. She and Miss Withers spoke together, in one voice: "I'm looking for an apartment—are you the agent?" They stopped, blinked, and smiled. Then the girl cocked her head. "Why—I remember *you!*"

It was Marcia Lee Smith, the star witness who had actually seen the jewel bandit in the act of departing. They discussed the coincidence of meeting like this. "After all," Marcia Lee said, "it's the only attractive building around here with any vacancies. I was out looking the other day, when it all happened."

She had been waiting here some time, hoping for the rental agent to show up. There was a sign on the door, *Gone to lunch, back in half an hour,* but it didn't say half an hour from any set time. "Anyway," said Miss Withers, "I don't need a rental agent to tell me whether or not I like an apartment. I'm going upstairs."

Marcia Lee tagged along. She was living now at the Martha Washington, but she hoped to find an apartment where she could entertain. "Entertain good-looking young detective sergeants?" Miss Withers pressed, and struck home, because the girl came as near to blushing as girls ever come nowadays. They poked through the second-floor apartment, praised the new Venetian blinds, the wide fireplace, the big shining refrigerator which, Marcia Lee pointed out, would make as many as sixty-four ice cubes at once.

The schoolteacher liked everything except the walls, which were a somewhat glaring shade of ivory. "It should be a rather

quiet apartment, too," she pointed out. "Set well back . . ."

It was not a quiet apartment at the moment, because the sirens were howling again. A radio car went up the street screaming bloody murder. From farther off other sirens took up the sound, like hounds on a scent . . .

Miss Withers, who had started to leap toward the stairs like a firehorse at the first alarm, now held herself in check. "Let them shriek," she said. "I'm not going to mess into it."

"But—" Marcia Lee said. "It's —it's—"

Evidently the girl was more impressed and thrilled with the activities of the force than was Miss Withers. "I used to feel that way, too," she confessed. "But I've decided that the police are a lot of nincompoops."

"Not all of them!" Marcia Lee said definitely. She edged toward the stair, started running down so fast that she tripped and slid the last few steps, spilling her handbag and vanity on the floor. The schoolteacher helped her up.

"And the sergeant may not even be on this case!" pointed out Miss Withers. But Marcia Lee was gone. Miss Withers waited, using all her self-control to keep from rushing after the sirens. Finally the rental agent, a baldish, gum-chewing young man, put in an appearance.

"My name is Leach, Al Leach," he said. "Sorry I'm late, but on my way back from lunch I stopped to see the excitement up on Fifty-seventh." Miss Withers waited. "Oh, it wasn't much," he continued. "Some fellow just smashed a window at Vanderbock's and grabbed an emerald ring."

"Imagine!" said Miss Withers. "Did they catch him?"

Leach shook his head. "He ducked around the corner, so a man told me. But everybody says that the police have drawn a sort of dragnet around the whole section. When you leave you'll have to be searched."

"Will I?" gasped the schoolteacher.

"Now about the apartments," he continued. "The painters and decorators will be finished in a day or so. I phoned the agencies to send every man they could dig up. The rent's eighty-five on a year's lease—and if you want any special shade on the paint now's the time to say so." Miss Withers hesitated, and he cocked his head. "I could let you have the top floor a bit cheaper—say seventy-five? It's had a first coat in a slightly darker tone, and the floor's been polished . . ."

Miss Withers hadn't thought about going that high. But it was worth looking into. "You go right ahead," he said. "I got to stay here a minute and give those painters hell for taking so long for lunch." He headed for the

front door where outside a truck was backing up.

Up the stairs, all three flights of them, went Miss Hildegarde Withers. She opened the door of the top-floor apartment, and entered. Instantly the pleasant smile with which she had been intending to greet her future home was erased by a quick gasp. She walked slowly forward into the big living room, stepping gingerly like a cat on a damp floor.

It was the walls. On the creamy white of the smooth surface someone had painted a great blue eye, which wept red tears on the baseboard. Beside it was a pink tree with a mermaid's tail instead of roots, and across one branch, limply twisted like a piece of warm butterscotch, was a curious object which was—which must be!—a pocket watch with hands pointing to five o'clock.

Miss Withers drew back and sniffed. This was not even good surrealist art. Then she realized that she was not alone. There was a man standing beside her, breathing rather warmly on the back of her neck. He wore streaked white coveralls and carried a pail of paint. His face, too, was well smeared.

"Now tell me honestly what you think!" he begged, waving at the wall. "Have I got something there, or not?"

"Why—" Miss Withers backed away a little, not sure whether a laugh or a scream was indicated. The man wasn't drunk, because the rank smell about him was linseed oil, not alcohol.

"You mustn't go," he said thickly. There was pleading in his voice. "I have to explain about the white, white walls. Nobody can go on forever painting white, white, white . . ." He stopped suddenly. "I'd like to paint you. I'd like to do you all pale blue, with your hair a rich yellowish-green." His smile faded, and the dreamy, puffy eyes widened. "It won't hurt!"

There was no getting past him to the door. Miss Withers had her umbrella, and now she raised it like a lance. "Stand back!"

"Don't scream, lady!" But she did scream, a goodly yip. Her voice echoed hollowly in the empty room. "Don't do that, lady!" he shouted, raising the pail of paint as if to hurl it.

"Mister Leach!" shrieked Miss Withers. There was the pounding of footsteps on the stair. The painter, ignoring the paralyzed schoolma'am, turned toward the door, waiting. An expression of innocent enjoyment marked his face. He lifted the pail.

"Look out!" Miss Withers cried. "Don't!" But poor Leach came rushing into the room. His eyes took in the scene, his brain reacted, but his legs of their own volition took him three steps closer before they stopped. And

by that time the pail of paint was over him. He lurched back, reeling and pawing at his eyes. Then he turned, stumbled, and half fell down the stair.

The painter turned back toward Miss Withers, but that lady had seized her opportunity and was now disappearing into the bathroom. The lock clicked behind her.

"Come on out, lady!" howled the painter. "The paint won't hurt you. If you don't like it you can wash it off!" He pounded on the door, kept on pounding until Leach came back up the stairs with two other painters and the nearest patrolman. Miss Withers even then did not unlock the door, not until the painter had been overpowered and pinned to the paint-covered floor. An ambulance arrived, and the doctor took one look and whipped out a hypodermic needle.

"Two minims of hyoscine m.c.," he observed cheerily, "and sleepy-by is what he needs."

"Do they ever get over it?" Miss Withers wanted to know.

"Lead poisoning? Why, sure. Give him a nice stomach wash of magnesium sulphate and he'll be good as new in a week, maybe sooner. Lots of painters get it—the lead in paint, you know. Delusions and so forth. It often takes the form of mild mania."

"Mild!" said Miss Withers bitterly. She gathered herself together as best she could, waded through the pools of spilled paint, and then stopped short in the doorway as Inspector Oscar Piper thundered up the stairs, followed by the young sergeant and a policeman. Piper was curious.

"What's that ambulance doing outside, and what's going on here, and—"

"How nice of you to drop over," said the schoolteacher sweetly. "You're only about ten minutes late."

The inspector listened to what had happened, and shook his head. "You know, Hildegarde, wherever you are, there's trouble. You breed it, like stagnant water breeds mosquitoes."

"Hmmp!" Miss Withers started down the stair, stood aside to let the stretcher go past her. The inspector followed her, almost amused now.

"It must have been funny, though," he observed. "You walking in on that screwball painter. It could happen to nobody but you, nobody in the world."

They came into the lower hall. "At least," she said tartly, "you can't blame me for what happened up on Fifty-seventh Street today. So lightning struck twice in the same place, eh? And is your dragnet working?"

He shrugged. "We can't tell yet. I think we'll get the guy—in spite of your tipping off the whole thing to the papers."

"I hope you do," she said sweetly. Then her head jerked back, like that of a startled horse. "What?"

Doggedly, he repeated it. And she stood there, rigid with indignation, while the inspector turned to confer with his aides and with the doctor. There was some question, it seemed, about the identity of the ambulance patient. "Book him at the hospital as John Doe for the time being," he ordered. "Mains, you can check with the employment office and the painters' union and find out who he is." He turned back to Miss Withers. "Hey, where are you going?"

"Home!" said that lady, very definitely.

"Well, you better let me send Sergeant Mains to pass you through the cordon, or—"

"I want no favors from you!" she snapped. "The idea of your thinking *I* blabbed to the papers!"

"Well?" shrugged Piper. "Nobody knew about the dragnet, outside of the department, except you and the commissioner."

"I knew—and the *commissioner!*" she exploded. "Of course, *I* must be the one. *I* have so many reporters in *my* outer office, and *I'm* in politics and need the good will of the papers, and . . ." The inspector was trying to talk, but she was not in the mood to listen. "And all right for you, Oscar Piper. You stood me up for dinner the other night. Well, now you can stew in your own juice. Go back to your precious dragnet, and see what it brings you. And when it fails, don't come to *me!*"

"That, my boy," said the inspector slowly, "is what they call giving somebody a piece of one's mind." Sergeant Mains stood beside him, looking dubiously after the departing schoolma'am. "The sad part about it is that she's right," Piper finished.

Consciousness of rectitude gave Miss Hildegarde Withers no inner feeling of satisfaction whatever on her homeward march, which was interrupted for nearly twenty minutes while she stood in line to have her handbag searched. The cordon was tight, no doubt about that.

She flounced back into her own apartment in the West Seventies, the apartment which she had decided to vacate in a month. In spite of herself she spent the rest of the afternoon listening in on the police wave-length. At six o'clock she turned back to the regular news broadcast and heard an announcer declaim that today New York had seen its most spectacular manhunt since the capture of Two-gun Crowley—a manhunt which was by this time admittedly a failure.

"I told him so," Miss Withers snapped at her mirror, without pleasure. By the time she had

picked at her dinner and done up the dishes, she was definitely uneasy. Somewhere, deep down in the bottom of her mind, the schoolteacher sensed that a signal light was burning, as it had burned so many times before, to tell her that she had missed something. It was an angry red signal . . .

At nine o'clock the boys cried an extra through the streets, with headlines COP KILLER RETURNS —GETS REST OF LOOT. There were remarks about butter-fingered police, and the need for a shakeup at Centre Street.

Much to her surprise, Miss Withers was not surprised at all when her doorbell rang some time later, and she found the inspector outside. He was a very tired and gray and deflated inspector.

"Oh," she said. "Come in."

He hesitated. "I thought of sending you flowers, only all the florists are closed. And I was going to have a Western Union messenger come up and sing you something, only they don't know the songs with the right words." He smiled wanly. "You see, it *was* the commissioner that gave out that story to the press."

"Come on in!" she insisted. "For heaven's sake, come on in." She stared at him. "Oscar Piper, have you eaten anything today?"

He shrugged. "I don't remember." But he came inside, sank into a chair. "I'm not hungry," he insisted. "Would you be hungry if they were going to take away your badge tomorrow morning? I'll be back at a precinct desk, see if I'm not."

"No luck at all with the dragnet?"

"None. We picked up three or four crooks we'd been looking for, but none of them is up to this sort of crime. And no trace anywhere of that emerald—that hunk of green ice!"

She fed him scrambled eggs, made him clean up the plate. She even insisted on his smoking one of his long greenish-brown cigars, a privilege hitherto denied him in her domain. Oscar Piper stared unhappily at the smoke as it rose.

"It's the same crook," he observed. "With the same twisted sense of humor. He made a laughing stock out of me and the entire force."

"An egomaniac," agreed the schoolteacher. Now the red bulb in the back of her mind was flashing and glowing like a neon sign. "A maniac—" She gulped. "Oscar! Suppose that your dragnet didn't fail! Suppose that it didn't catch your crook because he rode through in an ambulance!"

Piper tensed, then relaxed again. "I checked all that, Hildegarde," he told her. "The painter, you mean. No, he was a real painter, registered and every-

thing. And I called Bellevue and he was really brought in there to the emergency ward, booked for lead poisoning."

"When?"

The inspector thought it was about an hour ago.

She rose suddenly and headed for the bedroom, where her telephone was installed. Oscar Piper puffed unhappily, and she was back before the long gray ash had fallen from his cigar. "Oscar!" she announced. "Bellevue released that man twenty minutes ago, to a nurse from the Painters' Union Clinic!"

"Well? What's wrong with that?"

"Nothing at all. Except that I called Information, and there *is* no Painters' Union Clinic."

The inspector rocked back on his heels as if he had run into a haymaker. "That does it! Now I know I ought to quit the force and get a job as understudy to an idiot!" He started pacing the floor. "We had him! We had him, and just because he put on an act with a bucket of paint we sent him off in an ambulance with our blessing! Good gravy!"

"What about the emerald?" Miss Withers suggested.

"He swallowed it, probably. Anyway, it's gone and so is he . . ."

She shook her head. "A man as smart as that wouldn't risk swallowing the jewel, not when he faced the prospect of stomach pumps at the hospital. No, Oscar."

"Well, then?"

The red light flared again in the back of her mind, flared into an electric sign as clear as the messages which went twinkling around the *Times* Building.

"Oscar! The deadline or dragnet or whatever it is—it's all over?"

He nodded. "We had to order the men back to their regular duty, after they'd all met in the middle of the area and reported a blank." Miss Withers was grabbing her hat. "Hey—"

"Come on!" she cried. "Get a taxi."

The taxicab was not necessary, as it developed that young Sergeant Mains and a Headquarters car waited below. They piled in and Miss Withers gave an address. "And please, no siren!" she begged. "I know you all love the things, the way small boys love a whistle, but just this once . . ."

They cut south along Central Park West, red lights blazing, and then left at the Circle . . . And then they were outside the remodeled brownstone, with its UNFURNISHED APARTMENTS sign: "Wait here," ordered Piper, looking at the sergeant. Miss Withers was already rushing up the steps, and he hurried after her. The front door was half open, and in the lower hall with

its muddle of equipment one pale light bulb gleamed. Most particularly did it gleam down upon Miss Marcia Lee Smith, who seemed a bit startled.

"Still looking for the rental agent?" quizzed the schoolma'am.

Marcia Lee gasped, blinked, and answered. "Oh, it's you! I—why—I—" She was peering toward the door. "You 'member when we were here this afternoon? And I spilled my bag? Well, I lost eighty-five dollars somehow. I must have, because it's gone. You didn't see it, did you?"

Miss Withers said that it had been years since she had seen that much money all at one time. The inspector pushed into the scene. "What makes, anyway?"

"You remember Miss Smith," said the schoolteacher. "She and I were looking for apartments the other day, and we met again today. Our paths are always crossing."

"You haven't seen anybody hanging around upstairs?" Piper demanded of the girl.

"I haven't been upstairs," the girl admitted. "It was so dark and lonesome—I had just about decided I'd run along home and come back and look for my money in the morning."

"A very good idea," agreed Miss Withers. "It's a bit late for you to be out. But, by the way—" she lowered her voice—"there's a friend of yours outside in the car."

The inspector was already on his way up the stair, and Miss Withers hurried along after him. They approached the top-floor apartment on tiptoe, entered softly in the wake of the round beam cast by Piper's flashlight. The big living room was empty, except for the half-dried puddles of paint not yet cleared away. The kitchen, the bath, the bedroom, the closets—all empty.

"Maybe we're too late," Piper said. "Maybe he's been and gone, with the emerald." But Miss Withers thought not. They began to search. An empty apartment offers few hiding places. Piper looked under the drain in each bit of plumbing. He looked up the flue of the fireplace, and behind the Venetian blinds. He even raised each window, making sure that the emerald had not been hung outside on a thread.

Finally they both admitted failure. "I wonder," Miss Withers began, "if we might not get some information from that girl. Of course she's outside talking to your handsome young sergeant."

Of course she was—they could look down from the window. But even as Piper started to lead the way out of the place, Miss Withers froze. "My ankles!" she whispered. "They feel a draft."

Oscar Piper halted, looking dubious. "Oscar, the back door!

Somebody just opened it . . ." she insisted.

He nodded. Then, motioning her to stay behind him, Oscar Piper went softly back into the apartment. He crossed the living room, came into the kitchen. The rear door was closed and locked, but that didn't prove anything. He started to turn . . .

"Up!" came a voice behind him. "Up high—higher than that!" The bathroom door opened, and a man came out, a smallish man, no more than five feet six. He was in his middle thirties, and his mouth was twisted in a curious smile. He held an automatic pistol in his right hand.

"Back up!" was the order. "Now go on—both of you!" It was the mad painter, only he wasn't really mad. It was the jewel thief, the murderer of Sam Bodley, the man in the tan raincoat who had jumped so lightly to the waiting car . . .

"Don't make any moves, copper!" he said.

"What do you think this will get you?" asked Inspector Piper slowly, as he backed into the living room. "Why don't you drop that gun and give yourself up? I know you. You're Joe Swinton . . . Swinnerton? . . . Swinston, that's it!"

There was a difficult pause. "That's too bad," said the man with the gun. "Sorry you recognized me, copper. Because now I've got to knock you over, and I wasn't going to do that . . ."

Oscar Piper may have been worried, but he did not show it. "You haven't nerve enough to shoot."

"I've got more nerve than you," Swinston told him, and looked it. Miss Withers, who had been edging imperceptibly toward the front window, realized that of all the tough spots they had ever been in, this was about the toughest.

The inspector's body was as tense as a coiled spring, but he kept his voice easy. "Come on, Joe, where did you stash the emerald?"

Swinston didn't take the bait. "What good would it do you to know, copper? *You* aren't going looking for that hunk of green ice . . ." His mouth was smiling, but his eyes squinted narrowly, and he tightened in preparation for the recoil of the gun. It's now or never, said Hildegarde Withers to herself, and grasped the cord of the Venetian blind. It fell with a most terrific clatter. Swinston, caught off guard, turned and fired blindly. At almost the same instant he was kicked most deftly in the stomach by Oscar Piper, who had his own ideas about the amount of courtesy which should be extended to cop killers.

"Not exactly sporting, Oscar, but well-timed," observed the schoolteacher, as the inspector

slipped bracelets on the writhing bandit.

He looked up at her. "You all right?"

"It's about time you wondered," she told him, eyeing the neat round hole in the wall beside her left ear. But what interested her most was the sequence of events down on the sidewalk. The inspector came up beside her at the window, and they both stared down, wide-eyed.

Far below them, beside the Headquarters car, Sergeant Mains was embracing Marcia Lee Smith. And a curious embrace it was, for he had her arm pinned behind her back and was, at the moment, twisting it.

"When the shot went off she tried to swing a sap on me!" complained the bewildered young sergeant later, as they waited at the curb for the Black Maria, prisoners handcuffed together.

Piper grinned. "You've been monkeying with a buzz saw, Romeo. This dame is the one who drove the getaway car, in blonde wig and glasses. Then she hopped out and came back to give us a wrong steer on the description of her boy friend. Didn't you, honey chile?"

Marcia Lee swore at him in a South Brooklyn accent. "Don't talk," Joe Swinston told her.

"You'll talk," the inspector said, "when we find that emerald." He suddenly jumped as something cold and wet was dropped into his hand by Miss Hildegarde Withers, who had lingered in the apartment for a moment while he was shoving his captive down the stair. "What the blazes—"

"Of course," Miss Withers said. "Mr. Swinston here has just the type of mind that would see humor in hiding the emerald —the green ice—where he did. I should have figured it out sooner." She pointed to what Piper held gingerly in his hand.

They all looked down and saw, by the pale light of the street lamp, a melting ice cube in which glittered a big square drop of green fire.

run, pedro, run!

by . . . Joseph F. Callahan

The youngster didn't really know what had happened, but apparently he had killed the man. But he didn't know how.

IT WASN'T the man writhing on the floor with his life's blood flowing from him that disturbed Pedro. It was the horrible silence that gripped the noisiest bar in "Frisco." Even "Rags" had stopped making chopping noises on the piano. Pedro looked about him into faces that showed no sympathy. He wanted to say, "I had to do it," but he knew it would be to no avail.

These men were reviewing the facts and mentally judging him. No one said, "Murder," but Pedro understood the verdict just as though it had been officially pronounced in a court of law.

Angeli Citrone, the owner of "Bedlam Corner," was the first to recover from the shock. With speed that belied his girth, he pounced upon Pedro.

"Don't try to run, you louse," he said and secured a firm grip on Pedro's skinny wrist.

One of the customers who had partaken freely of "Bedlam's" products, suggested that some one call the cops. After making such a profound determination he reached for the bottle and poured himself a drink.

Here is a different world from that described in the stories of Oppenheim and Arthur Somers Roche recently—and an aspect of life in San Francisco that even some "natives" may not know. . . . The author, whose avocation is writing, is an attorney employed by the Army Ordnance Corps in Missouri.

Pedro, stricken with fear and for the first time realizing the magnitude of his offense made no attempt to flee. His mind was in a state of confusion. Try as he might he could not recall the incidents that led up to the fight, nor could he recall how he managed to secure the switch-back that was at this precise moment buried between the ribs of the man on the floor. He looked back at the victim. The body no longer writhed.

"Let's string the 'Mex' up," said one of the customers and the group about him advanced menacingly toward Pedro.

"No rough stuff, you bums," Angeli Citrone shouted and led Pedro over to a table in the far corner.

Pedro's hair stood straight up when he heard the melancholy wail of the approaching siren.

Someone shouted "Cops," and a goodly portion of the customers of the "Bedlam," made a hurried exit.

"What's going on here?" asked the uniformed Policeman.

By way of answer the group of curious, who had remained to glare at the police for fear they might miss some detail of the gory spectacle, stepped aside to expose the inert figure lying on the floor. The policeman examined the prone figure.

"He's dead," he announced in an authoritative voice and stood up to survey the people about him. When he saw Angeli, he walked over to him.

"How do you explain the 'Corpus Delecti?' "

Angeli nodded his head toward Pedro. "There was a fight, and before it was over the 'Mex' here buried the shiv."

The policeman looked at Pedro, "How old are you?"

Pedro moistened his lips with his tongue. "I'm thirteen, Sir," he replied. His voice was shaky and tears were coursing down his cheeks. "I—I—," he started to say and then buried his head in his hands and cried unashamed.

"O.K.," the Policeman said. "Let's go."

He took Pedro by the jacket and led him toward the door. To the other policeman who was restraining the curious onlookers, "Don't touch anything until the 'murder Detail' arrives. I'm going to take this— this—," he was going to say "Mex" but thought better of it and concluded, "This kid down to headquarters."

The roaring siren announced the arrival of Homicide.

Once outside the bar, Pedro began to regain his composure and while the policeman had a firm grip on his arm he felt that even this uncivility was in some strange way an act of charity. Now he was seated beside the policeman and the prowl car moved into traffic.

"You care to tell me what happened?" the Policeman asked.

Pedro shook his head. The policeman interpreted the gesture to be an act of defiance.

"That's right." he said. "You no speaka da English."

Pedro hastened to say, "No, Mr. Policeman. I speak English. I want to tell you but somehow I don't really know what happened, even though I knew I killed the man."

"Come—come," he said, "I'm trying to help you. You don't kill a man and then forget how it happened."

Pedro nodded his head indicating assent.

"No," he said, "I'm not trying to say that. I just don't know what I did. I was standing at the bar having a drink."

The Policeman interrupted, "Having a drink?"

He made a clucking noise with his mouth. "Thirteen years old and having a drink."

He appeared to grip the wheel firmer and grit his teeth. Pedro was certain that the policeman was very unhappy with him.

Pedro went on, "And then this man, the poor unfortunate one, may Mary have mercy on him and me, says, 'Hey, Grease ball you picked up my money.' I say, 'No, sir, I did not pick up your money,' and I showed him my empty pockets so that he would know that I had no money. But this did not satisfy the unfortunate one for he seizes me by my shirt and shakes me until my head hit the bar. As I got up from the floor he boxed my ears and then—." Pedro paused as though trying to recall.

"Yes," the Policeman asked, "What then?"

"In order to avoid being struck, I lowered my head and like a goat, I butted him in the stomach. This did not stop him, in fact he became very angry and closing his fist he pummeled me about the head. I butted him again and when he fell to the floor, he never got up."

"When did you use the knife?" The Policeman spoke without raising his voice above a whisper.

"The knife?" It was a question.

"Yes, the knife—that was a knife I saw sticking out of his back."

"Yes," Pedro said, "That was a knife but I know nothing of a knife. It was not mine."

"Well," the Policeman said as he pulled into the curb in front of the 12th Street Precinct. "That's the cutest story I ever heard. Suppose we tell the Captain this fairy tale?"

The policeman led the boy up the steps. "You do not believe me?" Pedro asked.

"Believe you?"

The Policeman repeated, "Yes, damn it, I *do* believe you, but no one else will."

The boy now recalled the admonition of his father. "Tell the

truth," he had warned, "No matter what the consequences."

Pedro was not sure that he now understood this sage advice.

When they entered the roll room a Sergeant raised his bald head from the book into which he was laboriously making what appeared to be stilted entries and nodded knowingly at the policeman, Mike McGrellis.

"Should I get the Interpreter?" he inquired sardonically.

"No," Mike said, "This kid knows how to handle the King's English," and he added as an after thought "to tell some weird tales."

"Bring him over and I'll book him."

"You're in a hurry, ain't you, Sarge?"

The Sarge directed a penetrating glare at Mike. "You're not going in for pampering the likes of this, are you?"

Before Mike could retaliate Lieutenant Henley walked from the door marked "Homicide" and came toward him.

"This the kid you picked up in 'Bedlam's Corner?' "

Mike nodded assent.

"Well," Henley continued, "Unless you want to hold him for delinquency you'd better let him go."

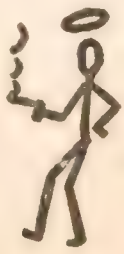
Mike said nothing. He tried to speak but no words came out. Henley seemed to enjoy his bewilderment.

"I'll swap this kid any day for Angeli, especially when I've got a label that's real sticky."

"Angeli killed that guy?"

"Yeah," Henley answered, "Angeli's clumsiness caught up with him. Evans of Homicide tells me that when they took over and shipped the body to the Morgue, he happened to notice a dame sitting over in the corner, rocking her foot in her hands and moaning like a whipped puppy."

"When Evans questioned the girl as to what was the matter, the story came out about how she was trying to separate Pedro and the man he was fighting with, when Angeli stepped in with his knife, and used the hardware. So Pedro's innocence was proved because Angeli stepped too hard on a lady's foot!"



momentous blemish

by...E. Phillips Oppenheim

Huggins had always protested that he hadn't killed her—and he'd been right. Benskin was facing the real murderer.

DURING the busy hours of the day, Roden Street, that bottle-necked thoroughfare connecting two of the great arteries of Northern London, is overcrowded with pedestrians and traffic of all descriptions. At three o'clock on this gusty March morning, it was curiously empty. Benskin, overcome on his homeward way with a sudden craving for tobacco, looked hopefully at the single figure approaching, a hopefulness which deepened into satisfaction as he saw that the man who was advancing with long, leisurely strides, was himself smoking. They met almost underneath one of the electric standards.

"I wonder whether I could trouble you for a match?" Benskin asked apologetically.

The newcomer thrust his hand into his pocket, and produced a bejeweled briquet, which he proceeded to coax into flame. Benskin, a close observer at all times of men and their ways, was a little intrigued by this early-morning wanderer. He was a man of dignified presence, pale-faced, with strong yet ascetic

It is true that the world of E. Phillips Oppenheim still survives, but it does so with its graces and its mores, its conventions and its caste-prejudices, shaken by the impact upon it of values the lack of subtlety of which would have dismayed Oppenheim, rapporteur of this quieter yesterday.

From: THE HUMAN CHASE, by E. Phillips Oppenheim.
Copyright 1932 by Little, Brown and Company.

features, dressed with a punctilious care which in a younger man might have approached foppishness. His black overcoat, open for the purpose of reaching his pocket, disclosed, as appurtenances of his evening clothes, a white cravat, tied with almost meticulous care, pearl studs, not too large but exquisitely chosen —his patent shoes and silk hat betrayed the assiduous attentions of the perfect valet. Yet there was one strange defect in his toilette at which the man who was now lighting his cigarette glanced with surprised interest. Between the second and third studs there was a small stain, which, to the latter's experienced eye, was undoubtedly the stain of a spot of blood.

Benskin blew out the light from the briquet and returned it with a word of thanks; its owner replaced it, buttoned up his coat, and passed on with a brief "good night." For a single second, as the two men were parting, they exchanged more or less inquisitive glances. In the gray eyes of the stranger there was no expression save that of the idlest curiosity. Benskin himself, however, was conscious of some other feeling—partly professional without a doubt, inspired in some measure by that peculiar blemish in the man's otherwise impeccable appearance. It seemed impossible that he should have passed the evening, at whatever function he had been attending, with that disfiguring spot of blood upon his shirt. His cool, unhurried demeanour betrayed no sign of having been led into any kind of adventure. Yet the conviction that there was history of some sort connected with that ominous stain remained with Benskin long after he had watched this early morning wanderer vanish into the pool of gray twilight at the end of the street.

Brooks, the East End detective, and Benskin's coadjutor on many occasions, looked up from his pipe with a smile of satisfaction when the latter walked into his room at Scotland Yard on the following morning.

"Well, we've got Eddie Huggins at last," he announced—"or rather we shall have, within an hour—and got him for keeps this time too."

"The Holme Street murder!" Benskin exclaimed. "I read about it in the tube, and it struck me at once that that was where the woman lived whom he's been in trouble about before."

"Same woman," Brooks assented cheerfully. "He's been living with her, or on her, for the last two years. He's done three months for assaulting her once, and six weeks another time, but she always seemed to take him back again. This morning she was found dead, with Eddie's knife in her heart. I'm going

around to the police station now to see him brought in."

"I'll come along, if you don't mind," Benskin suggested. "I've nothing on this morning."

They took an official car to the Clerkenwell Road Police Station. Benskin was at that time only mildly interested. It seemed to him to be one of those cases in which a notorious criminal had at last delivered himself into the hands of justice.

"Did he stay on in the house?" he enquired.

"No, but he was seen coming out early this morning. We telephoned down to the public house where he has a room. He got in at four o'clock, very drunk, and was still asleep. I've sent a couple of good men to fetch him. He'll be here in a few minutes."

The charge room at the police station was empty of misdemeanants, but there was an air of expectancy amongst the few policemen who were loitering about and the sergeant at his desk. They were in the act of exchanging amenities with the latter when there was the sound of a commotion outside, and a tall, heavily built man, bare-headed, handcuffed and blaspheming volubly, was almost dragged into the place. He glared around at them all as the door was finally closed behind him—a ferocious figure, with red, murderous eyes, masses of unkempt black hair, unshaven, and with every appearance of having slept in the disreputable clothes he was wearing.

"You've planted this on me, you b—!" he shouted, as the sergeant motioned for him to be brought forward. "You always meant getting me, you b—y tec!" he added, making a desperate effort to reach Brooks. "You'll get into trouble over this, though. I'm not going to swing for nothing."

"Better hold your tongue," Brooks advised him. "The sergeant will read over the charge to you."

The latter did as he was invited and signed the sheet.

"Take him to Number 7," he ordered.

The man looked despairingly around. For the moment, his truculence had departed. The dawn of a terrible fear was in his eyes.

"Look here," he said, "you've brought me in before and I've made no fuss about it. I knocked her out a few months ago and I'm not denying that I've done it before, but as to killing her—Gawd, I was never fool enough for that!"

"Keep your mouth shut," the sergeant admonished. "There'll be time enough for you to talk, if you're fool enough to do it, when you're brought up before the beak or at the inquest. You'd better send for your lawyer, any-

way. Whom do you want? Pussy Grimes?"

"Yes," the man answered sullenly. "You send for Grimes and look sharp about it. You've planted this on me, all of you," he added, struggling to shake his handcuffed fist. "You wait—blast you!"

He was led off, once more blaspheming. They could hear the echoes of his surly shouting all the way to the cells.

"Even Pussy Grimes," the sergeant observed from his desk, "will have to perform a miracle this time. Ed's just had cunning enough to stop before, but it was the odd glass of whiskey that did it."

Benskin and Brooks re-entered their car and, at the latter's suggestion, drove to the scene of the murder—a dreary-looking building in a street a little south of the Marylebone Road. There was a curious crowd standing outside and a policeman at the door.

"Is the inspector still upstairs?" Brooks enquired.

The man saluted.

"Still there, sir, and the doctor."

They mounted a flight of stairs and pushed open a door on the first landing, also guarded by a policeman. Inside, was an ordinary lodging-house sitting room, furnished tawdrily, but more expensively than the outside of the house might have suggested. There were saddle-backed couches and easy-chairs, a plush carpet, a thick rug, a choice collection of oleographs upon the wall, a sideboard upon which were half a dozen bottles—and, on the hearth-rug, something which was covered with a shroud. A doctor, who had been on the point of departure, the inspector and Brooks talked together in a corner. Benskin strolled curiously around the room, here and there touching an ornament, paying attention to everything except the concealed figure. He glanced through some illustrated papers, which had been flung carelessly on to a side table, and thrust one of them into his pocket. Presently, Brooks detached himself from the others.

"Nothing more doing here," he remarked. "Do you want to look at the body?"

Benskin shook his head.

"I've no taste for horrors," he admitted, "and the doctor's evidence is clear enough, I suppose?"

Brooks nodded.

"It's Eddie Huggin's knife, all right," he confided. "It's there now—one clean blow. Left his pipe on the table too. They drew the cork of a fresh bottle of whiskey," he went on, motioning to the sideboard, "and it's three parts empty, so they must have been pretty well gone. The landlady saw him come in and go out, and heard them scrapping all the afternoon. It's

the gallows for Edward Huggins this time."

Benskin nodded indifferently. There were very few on the staff at Scotland Yard who were ignorant of the man's record and fewer still likely to bestow a single sympathetic thought upon him. There was no doubt whatever but that he was a gallows' bird, brought at last to the gallows, where he belonged. Yet there was one slight circumstance which puzzled Benskin. It lingered in his memory hour after hour, so that, later in the day, he decided upon a somewhat unusual course. He left the Yard early and paid a call upon that celebrated and infamous thieves' advocate, commonly known as Pussy Grimes. The latter, whose offices were conveniently situated near Bow Street Police Station, welcoming his unexpected visitor cordially, although with some surprise. He tipped some papers from a cane chair, invited him to be seated, and leaned forward across the table at which he had been writing.

"Well, Mr. Benskin, sir," he said, "when one of you gentlemen comes to see me, I'm naturally curious about it. What can I do for you?"

"Nothing very much, I am afraid," was the doubtful reply. "I suppose I ought to apologize for coming at all. It was just an idea. Things look very bad for your client Huggins."

"So far as I can see at present," Grimes admitted, "he has handed himself over to you gentry in fine style. What's your game? Are you in here to pump me? Surely you don't need to this time?"

"Not in the least," Benskin assured him—"and, as a matter of fact, it isn't my case at all. If I have any object in coming, it is rather for Huggins than against him. Not that the fellow doesn't deserve whatever may be coming to him, but there's just one point of view, Mr. Grimes, that we detectives who have a scrap of conscience must remember."

"You mean—"

"I mean," Benskin explained, "that if, by any chance, Eddie Huggins, who was quite capable of this crime, and who, I am quite sure, has already committed it in his mind many a time, happened to be innocent on this particular occasion, the actual criminal would go free."

"Just so," the lawyer agreed. "Now you've started that line of talk, I'll tell you one thing that seems strange to me. You know who I am. You know my reputation," he added, with a smile which was almost a leer.

Benskin looked at him and nodded — a thin, under-sized little man, with a sallow face, high cheek bones, narrow black eyes, too deeply inset, unpleasantly prominent teeth, discolored

with smoking, a tangled mass of untidy hair, a *tout ensemble* which went ill with his black semi-professional attire.

"Yes, I know all about you, Grimes," Benskin acknowledged quietly.

"Well, these fellows look upon me as their friend as a rule," the lawyer continued earnestly. "They're never afraid to tell me the truth. They'll own up to anything as soon as they're sure the door's closed. I got Eddie Huggins off two years ago on that manslaughter charge. Well, he told me the truth before I started to work. If he hadn't, I shouldn't have had the ghost of a chance."

Benskin nodded.

"I understand."

"Well, this time, for some reason or other, he's crazily obstinate. He swears by everything on earth and in heaven that he found the woman dead when he got there. He admits that he threatened to do her in the night before, he admits that they had been scrapping most of the afternoon, he admits that he went there meaning to have another row with her, he admits that he drank three tumblerfuls of whiskey before he left the room—says he was knocked silly, seeing her lying there with the knife in her chest. He knows that he put down his pipe and left it on the table. He knows he was seen to leave the house and that he reeled back to bed, when, if he had been anything less than a fool—providing his story is a true one—he would have called in the police, but, even to me, he won't admit that he touched her."

"What about the knife?" Benskin asked.

"His knife, right enough—there's no doubt about that. Swears that he left it there the night before, had it out, and was half inclined to use it. Then they had a drink and made it up, and he threw the knife into the sideboard drawer."

"If he didn't do it," Benskin reflected, "has he any idea or suggestion to make as to who did or might have done? She had other men, I suppose?"

"Yes, she had other men," Grimes assented, "but they're hard to trace—mostly casuals, I should think. Ed has an idea that she got more money from one of them than from any of the others, but he doesn't know anything about him—never seen him near the place."

"I suppose she found Huggins money?"

"Regularly—plenty of it sometimes, too. A beastly case! I told him this morning that, unless he spat out the truth and gave me something to work on, I didn't know where to look for a defense. It didn't move him a jot. He swears that she was lying like that when he entered the room."

"Do you think," Benskin queried, "that he knows anything

about her friends which he hasn't disclosed?"

"Not he!" was the scoffing reply. "Ed Huggins would sell his own mother to save his skin. The woman was pretty tight-lipped—must have been."

"You're going to make enquiries about her, I suppose?"

"After a fashion," the lawyer replied, somewhat doubtfully. "So far as one hears, she was just an ordinary woman of the town, with the usual haunts. Something may come out about her, although how it is going to help Huggins, I can't imagine. The trouble is that he's got no money, and even a philanthropic lawyer can't afford to pay for work for nothing," he added, with an unpleasant grin. "I think you've got him this time, all right."

Benskin rose to his feet and nodded his farewell. His right hand was busily engaged, however, at the moment when Grimes extended his own.

"Well, the world will be none the worse place without him," he remarked, as he turned to go.

The lawyer was right. Certainly this time the law had a firm grip upon Mr. Edward Huggins. The magistrate, at the request of the police, remanded him, with a few curt words. At the coroner's inquest upon the body of Elizabeth Chalders, an unhesitating verdict was brought in of "Wilful Murder" against Edward Huggins, the day of the trial was duly fixed, and, depressed but blaspheming and protesting, Edward Huggins occupied in morbid melancholy what are known as the "State Apartments" in Wandsworth Prison.

Andrews, butler in the household of thirty years' standing, noiselessly opened the door of the library at Haddington House, Regent's Park, and presented himself before the desk at which his master was writing.

"A person of the name of Benskin wishes to see you, Sir Frederick," he announced. "I told him that you did not receive visitors without an appointment, but he wished me to say that his business was of some importance."

The man at the desk looked up a little wearily from his papers. He was very handsome in a somewhat cold and severe fashion—a man, apparently, of later middle age, although there was power still in his features, and in his undimmed eyes.

"I see no reason why I should be disturbed by the visit of an unknown person, Andrews," he protested gently. "Tell him to communicate with my secretary—with Mr. Henson—and an appointment can be arranged if advisable."

"Quite so, sir," the man replied. "I only brought the message, because I understood from

the gentleman that he was connected in some way with Scotland Yard and I thought perhaps it might have something to do with the investigations you are making on behalf of the Home Office."

"Scotland Yard," Sir Frederick repeated thoughtfully. "That seems strange, Andrews. Perhaps, under the circumstances, I had better see the gentleman for a moment."

"Very good, sir."

"And don't forget," his master added, "to let the *chef* know that the Major will be dining here tonight, and Lady Alice. A little engagement dinner I am giving them. Emil had better bear that in mind, in arranging the menu."

Andrews, whose thirty years' service had naturally given him a special position in the household, permitted himself a word of congratulation.

"This will be very good news to all the others, as well as myself, sir," he said. "We've missed the Major being abroad so long, and, if I might be allowed to say so, the one thing we always hoped for, even when they were children, was that some day he and Lady Alice would be married."

"Well, you are going to have your wish," his master assured him, with a smile. "They are to be married, as a matter of fact, in less than a fortnight."

Andrews took his leave, to return, a moment or two later, ushering in Benskin. Sir Frederick leaned back in his comfortably padded chair and waved his visitor to a seat.

"You wished to see me, Mr. Benskin," he said graciously. "What can I do for you?"

Benskin accepted the chair but made no immediate reply. He looked first at the door, as though to make sure that it was closed. Afterwards he glanced back again for a moment thoughtfully at the very distinguished gentleman who had accorded him this interview, and who was now leaning a little towards him in an attitude of courteous attention.

"You can tell me, Sir Frederick, if you care to," he replied, "exactly how you spent the evening and night of Tuesday, March 17th."

If the question came as a shock, the man to whom it was addressed gave little sign of it. For a single moment there seemed a grayer streak in his natural pallor, he had winced slightly, as though with the pain of some evil recollection. These things, however, were momentary. He answered in his usual tone and with scarcely any appreciable delay.

"In the first place," he said, "I delivered a lecture on that night to the British Medical Association."

"A lecture which was over at

eleven o'clock," Benskin observed. "Can you tell me exactly your movements between eleven and three?"

"Is this an official visit?" Sir Frederick asked coolly.

"Not entirely. If it had been, I should have been compelled to adopt a different attitude. It has taken me several weeks to get certain facts together upon which I feel that I may have to take steps. There is, however, a chance that the whole fabric of my theories is wrong, there is a chance that you may have a perfect alibi. I thought it better, therefore, to see you myself before I made use of certain information which has come to my hand."

"May I know precisely what is at the back of your mind?"

"You may. I am seeking the murderer of a woman named Elizabeth Chalders."

Sir Frederick's face seemed for a few moments to be furrowed with thought.

"And what leads you," he enquired, "to imagine that I could be in any way connected with such an affair?"

"The thing which first led me to make enquiries," Benskin confessed, "was a small spot of blood upon your shirt front when you stopped to give me a light in Roden Street, some fifty or a hundred yards from the corner of Holme Street, in which, as you remember, the murder took place. I could scarcely believe that you had delivered a lecture to the British Medical Association or attended any social function with such a disfiguring stain so plainly in evidence. I concluded, therefore, that the accident which was responsible for it had taken place later in the evening and I began to make certain investigations. I did so, I must confess, without the slightest idea that they would lead me into my present very disquieting position."

"Continue, if you please," Sir Frederick begged. "I may or may not be disposed to answer any further questions, but you have at least succeeded in rousing my curiosity."

"I will admit," Benskin continued, "that up to the present I have been unable to connect you directly with the crime. The man who is under arrest was seen to enter and leave the house. Up to now, there has been no question of any other visitor. That, however, may be accounted for by the fact that the landlady of the apartment was herself out until just before Huggins' visit. In that case, as you may see, Huggins' story, however improbable it sounds, might well be true—that someone had been in before him and committed the murder for which he is charged."

"Just so," Sir Frederick assented, "but notwithstanding that unfortunate accident to my shirt

front on the night in question, a certain amount of common sense must be used in dealing with an affair of this sort. What possible motive can you imagine as being sufficient to induce me, a man—you will forgive me—of some social standing, a scientist, I might even add a notable figure in the intellectual life of today, to murder a woman, who, according to the newspapers, appears to have been little more than a common prostitute. Upon the face of it, it seems to me that you would need very strong evidence —more evidence than that spot of blood upon my shirt—before you could seriously charge me with such an offense."

"With great trouble," Benskin confided, "I have been able to trace the woman's antecedents. The first clue I came across of any account was a very much worn illustrated paper upon her table containing a picture of your son. I afterwards discovered, amongst her effects, an ancient photograph of him."

Sir Frederick received the blow without flinching. Nevertheless, there was a change in the expression of his eyes. He looked across the room now as a man might look at his approaching doom.

"I found the murdered woman's sister after much trouble," Benskin continued. "She is living in a small village near Cambridge and I had to promise that her name should never be mentioned before she would tell me the little she did. It was whilst your son was up at Cambridge that the tragedy began. He felt it to be his duty to marry this woman and he did. They never appear to have lived together, but she has had money from him for the last ten years."

"Whether this is true or not, Mr. Benskin," Sir Frederick argued, "does it enhance very much the probability of your story, considering the manner of the woman's life? A divorce would always have been possible to any one who had become entangled with her."

Benskin shook his head.

"The woman herself," he pointed out, "was a Roman Catholic, and yours, as we all know, Sir Frederick, is one of the oldest Roman Catholic families in the country. Therefore, you see, divorce was out of the question. Your son's life was practically ruined.

"He then went to the colonies, where, I understand, his career has been most distinguished, and, except for four years during the War, he has never returned to this country. A little more than six weeks ago—curiously enough, the day after the Holme Street murder—he received a cable from you telling him to return. He came, I believe. This morning's papers announce his engagement to the young lady to

whom he has been attached for so long."

"You are a very intelligent person, Mr. Benskin," Sir Frederick declared.

Benskin shook his head.

"I can scarcely flatter myself to that extent. As is so often the case in the detection of crime, the beginning was a fluke. If I had not stopped to ask you for a light in Roden Street, and noticed the spot of blood upon your shirt, any investigations which I might have been tempted to make would have led nowhere."

Sir Frederick rose from his place at the desk. He walked the length of the room and back again. All the time, Benskin watched him closely. When he returned he threw himself wearily into his chair.

"Your visit is a little inopportune, Mr. Benskin," he said. "Tonight my son and the woman he is now free to marry are dining with me. I am hurrying on the wedding. As soon as that was accomplished, I was going to consider the matter as between this man Huggins and myself. He is what you would call a bad lot, is he not?"

"One of the worst," Benskin admitted.

"He has been in prison several times?"

"At least a dozen. Furthermore, he is strongly suspected of having committed a murder six years ago, and he was tried for manslaughter, and only escaped on a technicality the year before last."

Sir Frederick reached a volume down from a shelf, opened it at a certain page, and, crossing the floor, presented it to Benskin.

"I am not a person given to self-glorification," he said, "but perhaps you might care to glance through my record. I have rendered what many people have been pleased to consider great services to my country and to the cause of science. There are highly placed personages who must share this opinion, for only last week it was intimated to me that my name would be found in the next list of peerages."

Benskin read the long paragraph with respect, closed the book and handed it back.

"I admit without hesitation," he acknowledged, "that the world would be better without such a man as Huggins. I admit also, Sir Frederick, if you will allow me to say so, that the world owes you a great debt—the world of science and the social world. But there remains the puzzle—what has this to do with justice?"

Sir Frederick shrugged his shoulders very slightly.

"Ethical justice and justice meted out by you hounds of the law," he said gently, "must in some cases be a very different thing. For my own satisfaction, we will reconstruct the whole

situation. I have a son—an only son—to whom I am devoted. His whole life is being ruined by a woman without a single redeeming quality—a slut, a prostitute, a person without sense of honor or decency. I visited her that night with the idea of seeing if there was a single spark of better nature in her to which I could appeal. I hoped that she might consent to go to New Zealand or to Australia, and for a certain sum of money permit her death to be advertised. She refused. Her life seems to have been bound up with this vile fellow Huggins. I saw her for what she was—an ugly blot upon the earth, a disease spot such as the surgeon's scalpel removes day by day. I made up my mind quite suddenly to kill her. I took a knife from the open drawer in the sideboard and I did it. If that fool Huggins had not blundered in a few minutes after I had left, in all probability no one would ever have been arrested. As it is, what is this man Huggins? A worthless, depraved parasite, who has probably already deserved hanging a dozen times. What was she? A corrupt harlot, poisoning the very atmosphere she breathed. Why should it be accounted murder when such a one as she is removed? Why should my life count on the same plane as his?"

Benskin shook his head a little sadly.

"Sir Frederick," he pointed out, "these are ethical questions for the meditation of the philosopher. I am a servant of the great machinery of the law and it is our duty to see that, so far as our efforts can prevent it, no man innocent of any particular crime should hang for it."

Sir Frederick lit a cigarette and smoked for a moment thoughtfully. From behind the thick curtains came the muffled sounds of traffic in distant thoroughfares, the occasional hooting of a motor horn. Otherwise, the silence of the room was so profound that it became possessed of a certain significance. Then suddenly it was broken in peculiar fashion. There was a faint buzzing from the corner of the apartment, familiar, yet so utterly unexpected that both men were startled. From the loud speaker, whose ebony mouthpiece was turned towards them, came with stereotyped intonation the beginning of the nightly broadcasting announcement: *"London speaking to the British Isles. Weather forecast."*

Both men listened to the gruesome threats of wind and rain in a sort of stupefied silence. Then Sir Frederick rose mechanically to his feet.

"Someone has left the thing turned on," he remarked. "Excuse me."

He moved across the room. Before he could reach the instru-

ment, there was again a little whirring, followed by the same familiar voice:

"The News.

"Edward Huggins, lying in Wandsworth Prison, charged with the murder of Elizabeth Chalders, died this afternoon, in the hospital, of alcoholic poisoning."

Sir Frederick stopped short and gripped at the edge of a bookcase to support himself. Benskin rose to his feet in dazed fashion. Both men were staring at the instrument as though some strange human being had broken dramatically into the situation. Again there was the pause. The voice went on recounting some other happening. Sir Frederick stooped down, touched a switch and there was silence. Then he turned and faced Benskin.

"My God!" he muttered. "You heard?"

Benskin stood there, with his hand to his head. It was as though the echoes of that dramatic announcement were still vibrating in the room:

"Edward Huggins, lying in Wandsworth Prison, charged with the murder of Elizabeth Chalders, died this afternoon, in the hospital, of alcoholic poisoning."

"That," Sir Frederick observed, his voice not altogether steady, "seems to introduce a queer new element of interest into the psychological outlook upon the situation."

Benskin opened his mouth and closed it again. There was a sudden interruption—gay voices and laughter in the hall. The door was thrown unceremoniously open. A tall, bronzed young man, with his arm round a girl's waist, entered. At the sight of Benskin, he paused.

"Sorry, Dad, if we're interrupting you," he apologized. "I had no idea there was any one here. The fact is—"

"We've come an hour too soon," the girl intervened. "Our house is much too small for an engaged couple and Freddie promised to show me some of his trophies."

Sir Frederick smiled sympathetically.

"You must let me introduce my friend, Mr. Benskin," he said. "My son, Major Pinsent—Lady Alice Cranston."

The young man, sunburnt, but otherwise a juvenile edition of his father, stepped forward and shook hands. The girl was pretty in a quiet and thoughtful way. She, too, nodded pleasantly across the room.

"Hope we're not interrupting anything very tremendous," the young man ventured.

Sir Frederick waved them away.

"Don't forget that dinner is at eight," he enjoined.

They took their leave. The two men faced each other once more in the stillness of the empty room. It was not until the sound of the receding footsteps had died away that Benskin answered the question in the other's eyes.

"Sir Frederick," he said, "you have presented me with an ethical dilemma which I shall not attempt to solve. I will only tell you this," he added, smiling faintly across at the older man: "I have known Eddie Huggins for some years, but I should never have believed him capable of such an act of good taste."

"Plain words," Sir Frederick begged.

Benskin threw his notebook into the fire.

"I have never wasted a fortnight's work so cheerfully," he declared.

JACK THE RIPPER IN GLASGOW?

PLAINCLOTHES POLICE OFFICERS mingled with Glasgow's Saturday night celebrants as we went to press, moving through the crowds around the coffee stalls looking for a "Man in Black," a man who had brought a Jack-the-Ripper terror to the city's women.

The previous night, five women had been knifed in the streets within an hour and a half. At police headquarters it was said, "From the descriptions we have been given we think one man was responsible. With this type of assault there is always the likelihood that the man may soon seek fresh victims. . . ."

In Midland Street, a gloomy street that runs under a railway, two women had been walking some distance apart. Suddenly a young man in black had run towards them, lunging at each with a knife. Both women had screamed, and the man had disappeared.

But fifteen minutes later homeward-bound crowds at Waterloo-Street bus station heard a woman scream and found her standing near the stage door of the Alhambra Theater clutching a stomach wound.

Then, just before midnight, a fourth woman screamed and collapsed in Drury Street. Passers-by who went to her aid saw a man run off.

Less than an hour later a fifth woman was attacked in Nicholson Street, Gorbals. She had a deep gash in her side.

While two of the victims were hospitalized, Glasgow's police hunted a man for whom all this *could* have been a rehearsal. . . .

THE saint's RATINGS

Must justice triumph?

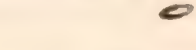
OUR RATING SYSTEM:	
	Three haloes: Outstanding
	Two haloes: Above average
	One halo: Passable reading
	A pitchfork: For the ash can

It doesn't always, you know. Unsolved crimes many times outnumber solved crimes in the police records. Yet in the paperbacks—as in the comics and motion pictures—justice always plows through to its inevitable triumph. In every other detail, including the most intimate details, these books specialize in real-life accuracy; with the single exception that criminals must always pay the Supreme Penalty. Who's fooling whom? Not only is this approach unrealistic, but it kicks the legs out from under many stories before they have barely begun. A good example is THE SNATCH, *discussed below. We all know, that when we start a story of a planned crime, all the characters will end up either dead or in jail. It's time for a change. Just* one *book in which the crooks get away with it would do the job! Forever after that we could read stories with the pleasure of not knowing the ending. How about it, you writers—any volunteers for the pillory?*

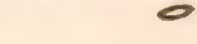
BUILT FOR TROUBLE, by Al Fray (Dell, 25¢)

Fray again makes a success of his own blend of strange occupations and crime. This time he mixes up a fascinating tangle of blackmail-death-publicity, a professional beach boy, and of course, sex. A pleasing mixture.

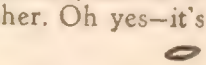
BLOOD ON THE DESERT, by Peter Rabe (Gold Medal, 35¢)

Keen-sighted scene setting in North Africa and sharp characterization prepare the reader for a story that never really comes across. But it should be read if only for some post-passion dialogue that is a wonderful parody of Hemingway at his worst. Wish it were intentional. 

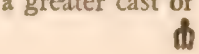
THE SNATCH, by Harold R. Daniels (Dell, 25¢)

A shame. The unhappy choice of kidnaping as a theme destroys this volume. Soundly written and three-dimensional characters move through a depressing story that we *know* can have only one ending. 

PASSAGE TO SAMOA, by Day Keene (Gold Medal, 25¢)

Pure old-fashioned pulp, which will be appreciated by followers of that school. By the exhausted last page everyone is either killed, conked, cracked, carved or crushed. The survivors of course end up in bed with each other. Oh yes—it's about ships and diving in the Pacific, too. 

THE BLONDE, by Carter Brown (Signet, 25¢)

Mr. Brown's books have sold over 18,000,000 copies. The New York Telephone Directory has at least that many readers as well. In addition to a greater cast of characters, the phone book is far richer in plot. 

city in the bottle

by . . . Hayden Howard

He was the obvious candidate for the frame. He hated the DA. He'd said so. Once both were dead — that'd be that!

WHEN the inrushing bus glared its headlights through the cabbage palms, illuminating the bronze Confederate general and his ranks of empty park benches, I was in no condition to make a decision. But I stood up, clutching my bench. Across the street in the sedan with sideswipe scars, those two pale faces were still turned my way. The bus hissed to a stop between us, and I stood shaking, almost crying. I needed a drink so bad.

If I tried to pawn my gabardine raincoat while my cheek was twitching like this, the gnome behind the counter would reply contemptuously: "Feefty cents," knowing I'd take whatever he offered. So I had to get a drink in me first, to give me the "willpower" to hold out for more money, enough money to drink myself to sleep again.

But if I worked the people flowing from this bus, those two moon-faces might pounce. I was afraid they were Vice-Squad waiting for an excuse to pick me up and pay me off for the tailing job I did for Browne's defense attorney. Pay me off with gun butts in

What happens when people get too ambitious? Hayden Howard, who will be remembered for his superb BLOOD ON THE MEDICINE ARROWS (Saint, *Dec. 1956) and* AMATEUR ASSASSIN (Saint, *June 1957), returns with this story of the doings in a captive city when rival gang interests and ambitions clash.*

some back-row cell. Thirty days for panhandling on top of that, thirty days without a drink. Unbearable.

It was only because I needed a drink so bad that I'd photographed the Vice-Squad sergeant taking a pay-off from one of Browne's competitors in the bolita racket. That helped sour the sergeant's testimony against Bre'r Browne. That got the sergeant busted. It was going to get me busted apart.

An elderly woman hurrying toward me dropped her package. I acted instinctively, handing it back to her.

"Oh, thank you, suh." Her hand fluttered at her lace fichu.

My gabardine raincoat, relic of past glory, had impressed her. But when my turning face caught the streetlight, she gasped.

I whispered: "Please mam, only a dime for a cup of coffee."

"Young man, you should be 'shamed of yourself. Go to the County Farm. That's what we're *payin'* taxes for."

But I'd served more terms on the County Farm than she had. They don't even taper you off. Man can't live on sowbelly, grits and B_1 capsules alone. "Please mam, only a dime so I can take the bus over the river where I have a fine job waiting for me—"

Her back flounced into the darkness. Without breaking my stride to see what those two pale faces were doing, I dodged through the hedge into Municipal Park and ran like an uprooted scarecrow among the palmetto clumps. When I paused, all I could hear was my breathing—like a ruptured accordion. Then, ahead of me something rustled through the moon-struck bamboo jungle. A pale apparition limped toward me, not D.T.s, rather my bottle-buddy, Crackers, swathed in newspapers.

"Rip," he sighed without anger, "Ah been rolled."

"Rolled? You've been stripteased! Yeah bo!" If I'd had a drink in me, I could have laughed, but not maliciously, for Crackers' long, dolefully innocent young face always made me feel like laughing, but not at him. His straw-thatched head, ducking with embarrassment, his gentle eyes, hopeful as a calf's, was a reminder that the world is not all venom and bayonets, nightsticks and broken bottles. "Here, longshanks," I laughed, "put on my raincoat."

"Youah shuah you won't need it, Rip?"

"I just need what it represents," I cracked bitterly, helping him into the sleeves. "You're my size, Cracker-boy. We'll cut across the park and work the people coming out of the early shows."

"Aw-aw, Ah don't want to." He studied his overlapping toes.

"No law against barefoot," I laughed. "You could charm a dollar from a police judge." His innocent face would have earned me

a case of scotch a day if it were mine. "A dollar will get you another set of relievers." That would be old tennis sneakers, sweatshirt, dungarees, what they give you when you pawn your clothes. "A dollar will buy such a fire for my belly I'll argue five bucks for my very fine imported English gabardine raincoat."

When we stepped upon the sidewalk, the lights of a slowing car stretched our shadows back into the park. Before the car could graze the curb I recognized the sideswipe marks on the fenders. Yell "Run!" and a bum automatically runs, and I was close behind him. But grits and alcohol take the poop out of your legs. Mine tangled.

As one of the two burly shadows ran at me, bullet-headed, and suddenly raising a moon face peculiarly white, I realized he was no cop and lashed out with my feet, yelling for the police. I dropped him across my legs. His face squirmed up my body and he rolled me over with the deftness of a wrestler. Startlingly, his knuckles ground into my spine. It felt as though my legs had twitched off like lizards' tails. An habitual drunk has one burst of strength and then he's a punching bag, and I faded through a sound-world of thuds, gasps and screeching bus brakes.

From a distance, a thick, fruity voice called: "Wheah's 'is shoes?" And then, though no time had elapsed for me, I was crawling on the sidewalk and the sedan was gone. My legs wouldn't work. I lay staring at the ten-dollar bill in my fist, which was another way of saying: Forget it, buddy, hop a freight.

A man with a brief case strode by.

"Police," I called. "My buddy's been kidnapped."

It is possible that man didn't hear me. Two couples skirted me and I gasped as loudly as I could: "Paralyzed, got to go to the hospital."

"Drunk," a girl's bubbling voice giggled.

After a while I heard sirens. Not an ambulance, a police car squealed against the curb. Hastily I wadded the ten-spot into my cheek, alongside my back teeth.

A flashlight dazzled at my face. "Holy saints," laughed the shadowy cop. "Get out and give me a hand, Joe. 'Tis the great detective, hit bottom again. Observe the scar on the bridge of the nose. Sure, the drinking from fruit jars they tell me. And the baby-blue eyes peeking out of their pus-pots. 'Twould be better to drink prussic acid and die all in one gulp."

I managed to gurgle: "My buddy's been snatched," as they dragged me erect and an electric prickling ran through my legs.

"Kidnapped, now? And worth a fifty thousand ransom? 'Twas the little men on pink elephants, sent by the D.A. to persecute

you—?" They slid me on to the back seat; it was only three blocks to the Station, and they walked me up the endless concrete steps while the numbness left my legs and ringed around my brain.

"Look what we brought you! 'Tis Rip Collins, America's foremost private investigator, come to make Mister Wales give him back his license—"

"My buddy's been kidnapped," I whispered, and the Desk Sergeant tipped back to rest his shoe on the desk while he thumbed carelessly through my official file-folder.

"Vag, vag, vag, D and D, thirty-two times this year. Let him sleep it off," he said gently. "I guess the reason the D.A. doesn't want him run out of town is as an example to the rest of the ops."

"I'm not drunk," I yelled, about as loud as a wheeze. "Listen flatfoot. Crackers, Liberty McCoy, you know who he is—he's been kidnapped, slugged anyway. How about at least checking the receiving hospitals!"

The sergeant took his foot off the desk. "Don't get pushy with me, Rip. You're not the big principal op with the fancy office anymore. For a couple of years now, your label in this city has been: common drunk. In this last election when you turned stoolie for the newspapers, that was your last chance. You lost. Mr. Wales is still D.A. and you're just another wino in the park, and don't forget it again!"

"Dammit, I can pass your blood test!"

"You couldn't pass an alk test after six months in solitary. They had to carry you in here. And watch your language," he snapped as they prodded me toward the door.

In the big cage, I stumbled groaning among the other drunks. Every nerve in my body was jittering like a short-circuited wire. My need for a drink blotted out everything else. Desperately I rubbed my knuckles up and down on the unexplainable white grease on my shirt. An ex-bail-bonder crawled over, ferret-faced, and sold me two yellow-jackets, sleeping capsules. When he took all of my ten-spot, I was too sick, too weak to resist; oblivion seemed to last but a moment.

In the gray dawn the bums were clutching the wire, jabbering. Something big had happened. Someone laughed and laughed. Then they came, they came for me; I couldn't understand what I'd done. Groggy.

Along the corridor smelling of latrine soap, they hustled me toward the D.A.'s office in the County part of the building, and one cop said dimly: "He called off the raid, huh?—"Yeah," said the other. "Looks like this new regime wets its pants as quick as the old. Grunemadd's gotten too big to pinch."

To my surprise, it was the Assistant D.A., a youngish squirt with corkscrew red hair around a tremendous dome-forehead, like some mad scientist on the T.V., who was sitting behind Wales' littered desk. He squinted through his owlish horn-rims at me as if the sight of me pained him, but his eyelids spread, and suddenly he seemed fascinated by my chest, though it had slipped a good deal recently. Even I peered down at the white smears on my shirt.

Chief Loe started to say something, but that squirt Assistant D.A. silenced him with a gesture you'd expect from Napoleon but not from a squirt lawyer pulling down a couple of hundred a month from the County. "Don't tell him, Chief, let him see it," he sneered. "Collins, can you read?" He hurled the morning paper at my face.

"Make him pick it up," he hissed, and a harness-bull nudged me, but I didn't move. "Pick it up," the squirt screamed, turning crimson and banging his little fist on the desk. When I smiled stupidly, still motionless, for those yellow-jackets had left me with the bemused feeling I was watching a movie, the cop must have got scared he meant him and hastily picked up the newspaper and opened it for me.

D.A. MURDERED BY DEAD MAN. That was quite a headline.

My blurry gaze struggled along the black bug-tracks. — *"Near midnight last night, long-time D.A. Fred "Baldy" Wales was shot down as he left a party at the home of turf enthusiast S. M. Savoyard. According to Wales' bodyguard, Abner N. Wilhoite, a dark sedan with scratched fenders was parked opposite the house with a man leaning against it. Ignoring Wilhoite's warning, the D.A. started across the street, demanding that the man tell him what he was doing there. The man fired twice. As Wales fell, his bodyguard returned the fire, riddling the killer, who pitched forward on the street as the sedan drove off at high speed.*

"Wilhoite is quoted: 'It seemed like that car started off while the gunman beside it was still shooting. By the time he dropped, the car was gone.'

"County Coroner R. D. Woods, M.D., who was at the party, pronounced Wales dead. Noticing a peculiar lack of bleeding on the part of the gunman, Woods began an autopsy in the wee hours of the morning and announced in his opinion that, due to a massive cerebral hemorrage incurred from a blow by a blunt instrument, the killer had been dead for at least fifteen minutes BEFORE he was shot by Wilhoite. He was medically dead at the time D.A. was murdered. It would seem that Fred 'Baldy' Wales was shot down by a dead man."

"Lucky I was in jail," I laugh-

ed thickly. "You can't 'cuse me of knocking that nine-lived gunsel on the crock." I looked around for a place to lie down.

Through my sleepy fog came the Assistant D.A.'s shrill yell of rage, and Chief Loe's soft voice: "Rip, boy, you didn't read faah enough. The young boy who shot Mistuh Wales didn't have no clothes on, just your raincoat, and the Desk Sergeant remembers last night you was asking for him, your buddy, Crackers. He's been fingerprinted as Liberty Nathaniel McCoy. Your friend, Crackers, that's who."

I couldn't speak.

The red-haired Assistant D.A. cocked his eye at the electric clock. "Chief," he announced as significantly as if he was in a radio play, "my plane takes off for the State Capitol in twelve minutes and I expect to return late this afternoon. I expect you to produce some encouraging leads in press-time for the evening editions. This mess can make or break all of us, depending on how fast it's cleaned up."

Someone tittered nervously, and the Assistant D.A. whirled. His gleaming lenses paused at me. "This ex-private investigator's revenge motive and underworld connections make him an obvious suspect as an instigator or go-between. His filthy rags are unsanitary; before you begin interrogation, burn them, delouse him."

I'll kill you, kill you, kill you, my thoughts hammered.

"No, you won't," Chief Loe sighed when the door had closed behind this latest Napoleon.

The chief's shrewd gray eyes engulfed me. A leathery skeleton inside his grease-spotted, gray, double-breasted suit; a bean-pole of a man, who moved as though he fed six tape-worms; the newspapers called him "The Chief Without Force." Twice before he'd been Chief. A reform victory ousted him the first time. But after a year their fine banners were in the mud, the Police Force in chaos. A delegation of citizens waited upon Chief Loe.

The second time he got the boot was when the "open city" boys bought the next election and paid off one of their cronies with the post. But after five months, in desperation they, too, called back Chief Loe. He at least made sure the patrolmen shined their shoes, that suspected street-walkers were not detained in the squad-room, that bodies weren't left lying on the street to frighten children on their way to school.

He'd nod at whatever conflicting orders he received from above and continue his own subterranean maneuvers. He believed in reasonable arbitration, a restrained slicing of the pie rather than gang warfare and futile arrests and highly publicized raids whose only effect was on the city's reputation. "As mah daddy used to tell my

Maw, that ant poison you're sprinkling costs more than the ants eat and it's liable to make the baby sick," he'd drawl, wagging his gray head in relaxed hopelessness.

Now, he wagged his gray head for me to precede him downstairs.

"I like that 'long-time D.A.' stuff," I muttered. "How long was Wales in, two years?"

"Twenny-two months 'n eleven days." Chief Loe and I were old friends for a reason that will emerge. I wondered if he would dare to squash Grunemadd, now that Wales was dead, and revive the democratic order of bookies, bootleggers and bolita operators.

It was Chief Loe who made them see that less greed, thus less scandal, more peace was to their best interests. At that time they helped him squeeze out the protection-racket boys, the mad-dog gunmen and a good share of the thieves. The Chief became a sort of underworld mediator, and never were the citizens safer. But the then D.A., a lazy politician who stirred up no trouble, was caught by the newspapers in some minor graft, and Fred "Baldy" Wales was brought down from New York.

Appointed by the governor, naturally he wanted to start out in a fanfare of trumpets that would be remembered at election time. He broke up Loe's democratic confederation of moderate parasites, indicting the top boys. Without casting any direct aspersions at Chief Loe, he "took over" the Vice-Squad, which was at that time a small and starveling stepchild. There was a moment of anarchy, but before too many bystanders were felled by stray bullets "Baldy" Wales proved himself also an organizer.

For, one day there stepped from a canary-yellow Cadillac with New York license plates a pear-hipped little gentleman currently calling himself Mr. Grunemadd. He was accompanied by half-a-dozen well-known New York gunmen. It soon developed that when they shot people, they gladly submitted to Chief Loe's arrest, for the D.A., Wales, always knew a case of self-defense when he saw it. Overnight, the city, the parasitical element of it, was reorganized in a peaceful pay-off pyramid with Mr. Grunemadd at the apex, and "Baldy" Wales was enabled to send his daughters to college, among other things.

Over my shoulder, as we went down to the basement, I said bleakly, trying to shut Crackers' long face out of my mind: "Two-bits that red-haired squirt talks the governor into appointing him D.A. In this city, the way to get elected is to be the incumbent."

In spite of photographs, depositions, I had gathered for the newspapers, "Baldy" Wales had been re-elected. One of Grunemadd's fronts had paid Crackers a dollar for each time he voted,

presumably for Wales. Chief Loe had continued to mournfully eye the sky and even declare himself "not concerned with politics." Apparently he went on being a poor man. His wife acquired a dyed muskrat coat. Off-duty, he drove a second-hand car. He was reputedly banking considerable of his not-too-generous salary, preparing to retire, it was said. The other two times he'd been out of office, he'd been caught short. The first time, he'd even worked as an occasional op for me.

I sat down in the straight chair under the lights. Chief Loe shrugged in apology for the melodramatic stage-setting. The stenog crossed his knees. Hulking Lt. Beardon asked: "Should we burn his clothes? Lice? Bacteria?" He was burlesquing the Assistant D.A. "Underarm perspiration? Deadly alcohol vapors?"

"No," I said.

"Why?" said Loe.

"Because I'm a walking clue," I replied, feeling my cheek beginning to misbehave itself. "One drink and I'll explain why my clothes are your number one lead."

"Here we go again," Lt. Beardon groaned, taking off his coat.

"No, get it fouah him," Loe sighed.

"None of your confiscated corn whiskey," I bluffed hopefully.

"Now look who's getting choosy," Lt. Beardon laughed.

"At the package-store on the cornah," the Chief said. "Put it down to miscel-something expense. Ah'm going upstairs. Theah's a Retail Merchants' parade this afternoon and sixteen cross streets got to be blocked off," his voice died away up the stairs; he didn't like to watch me get drunk. As for my story, he would read the stenog's transcript in the quiet of his office. He was not going to get rushed, no matter who'd been murdered. Patience was his strong suit; he was the best shadow artist who ever worked for me, patience, patient as the heron who fishes as motionless as a jagged stick.

After a long pull on the bottle, I felt less like a jitters case. Lt. Beardon disengaged me from it without spilling a drop and stood it in the corner where he wouldn't have to look at it. I licked my lips at him; I can spot a fellow lush a mile away.

With subtle motive, I told Beardon about those two pale faces in the scratched sedan without mentioning the loan of my raincoat to Crackers. "This white goo on my shirt must have got there when those two strong-boys jumped us in the park, where they grabbed Crackers and fixed me with judo or chiropractic. Your chemist ought to test this gunk. It's whiter than cold-cream."

"What about your raincoat? The chief recognized it as yours."

"Never saw it before unless I get another drink."

"You think you're pretty cute!" But he passed it to me.

Finally I muttered: "It was dark and Crackers had been rolled and I loaned him my raincoat. Those stupid gunsels, they were looking for a raincoat instead of a face. But whoever cooked this up was no square.—If it had been me they held against the car door, unconscious but alive, if it had been my hand they squeezed around the gun, my arm those dumbos aimed along, you cops wouldn't even know you had a problem. I would have bled convincingly for the coroner. I had the motive, all right; every bartender in town has heard that I'm going to get even with Wales. You would have assumed it was my show, and yanked bums out of the park, worked them over until some poor slob confessed to driving the car just so you'd stop hitting him. Then everybody would pat everybody else on the back, maybe go down and grin at me in my refrigeration drawer in the morgue. The case is solved, all the loose ends tied up. Typically brilliant police work scores again!"

"*I* would have figured you were hired," Lt. Beardon replied with a hurt note in his voice. "My theory is, to prevent local leaks, the instigator of this thing had a couple of torpedoes flown down from New York especially for this job, then flown back again just as quick."

"And they were half-wits or hopped to the gills," I coughed.

His ruddy face spread in a toothy grin. "Yeah, yeah, they did blow it like amateurs. I don't know; I guess this thing may give us a bad time." His grin slid off his face, leaving a vacant, tired, pouchy-eyed expression; he was only three years from retirement and would never make captain now. His dull eyes settled on the bottle.

The newspapers will give you a bad time, I thought, hurriedly tipping that bottle, gulping like a baby who suspects it will be taken away from him.

My suspicion was well-founded, for Lt. Beardon promptly told the short-hand expert to hurry my story upstairs to the Chief, and reached for the bottle, which I maneuvered behind me, displeasing him.

"You loaned your raincoat to Crackers because you'd been tipped off those gunmen were looking for you!"

"No," I yelled. "Damn you! What do you take me for? A Judas? Putting my overcoat on my own buddy so he'll be killed? I wish they'd taken me."

"Yeah?" he croaked, his ruddy face shimmering in the light.

Alcohol puts the gas back in my engine, gives me the Superman delusion that made me a pretty tough baby as a private op.

I swung smack at his face. Only he'd ducked. He helped me back into my chair, saying apologetically: "I didn't realize he was that good a friend of yours," and proffered me the bottle.

"I wish," I gasped, "you people would let me out to work on this thing. I still have a lot of contacts."

"Such as Browne," he replied somewhat stiffly. "Someone's liable to catch you up a lonely alley on that score. Sergeant Almond, the fall-guy you sneak-photoed, was only four years from retirement. With the salaries this city pays, it's tougher than hell to serve on the Vice-Squad. The temptation gets too much for a normal guy, say, when his wife needs an operation."

"When you've got to have a drink," I retorted, "the temptation is not so easy either. Browne's defense shyster hunted me up in the park with a fifth of bonded Scotch and a fistful of small bills."

I'd felt ashamed of working for Browne, even if he was the only surviving fly on Grunemadd's pie, and wondered if my next downward step would be working for Mr. Grunemadd like the rest of the yellow-bellies. Grunemadd, with an assist from Wales, the D.A., was muscling Browne's traditional bolita runners out of the business district. The Vice-Squad, under Wales' thumb, not Chief Loe's, was harassing the boys, and blind to the white ticket salesmen Grunemadd's number-one muscle, Mike Railley, was installing in all the cigar stores. Unless Wales' assassination had thrown a wrench into the machinery, Grunemadd would soon have the city sewed up tight, except for uptown. I could picture Browne's leathery old mug, topped with white wool, breaking into a big ivory grin when he heard Mr. Wales was as dead as a pork chop.

A young cop peered into the room. Before he could step back, Lt. Beardon snapped: "Bring your nose in all the way. Now, take this guy's shirt to the chemist. Tell him the white stuff. And hit the light switch on the way out, and close the door after you."

His hand closed on my bottle. I knew how easy it was for him to convince himself the confiding share-the-bottle approach was the way to make me contradict myself about what happened in the park. In the best interest of Justice, the Police Force and so forth, he swallowed like a partly clogged sink.

"I wasn't tipped off," I laughed suddenly, and a long, innocent, woebegone face rose before me so that I felt like crying but continued the laughing sounds. "If I'd known I was the goat, I wouldn't have let Crackers come near me. —Hell, this new D.A. should be a weird one. I never even heard of the guy. Gimme back the bottle. Does he have a name?"

"Henry Morgan. Guess Wales imported him about the time you fell off the water wagon."

"Which time?" I laughed, sputtering as I tossed one off.

"Strictly a pencil-pusher until the D.A. let him win a few easy convictions. — Don't drink it all! —Bingo, he blows big talk. Thinks he's another Tom Dewey, is going to clean up the town, he says, which is not so very subtle a dig at his boss, old Baldy Wales. He's young, Henry is, and red-headed."

"Pass it back," I muttered. "What did he have on Wales? Wales doesn't take that kind of guff. Look what he did to me."

"He would have canned Morgan, I think. Only he died, remember? Shot down by your raincoat. Drink it up, drink it up. That's what finished you in this town. Not Wales, not Grunemadd. Go on, fill your snoot!"

"I would of been awright," I yelled. "I woulda' never touched another drop. Only here I go and PROVE Wales is taking hush from Grunemadd. I get photos, photostats, depositions, and the newspapers, they pay me off, they give me a bonus, they page-one it for a week before election, a story no one can deny. And the people, lazy damn fools, thirty-two percent go to the polls because it's only a city election. Stupid or bought, damn 'em all. They vote Wales in again anyway!"

"Hey, Loot," a cop yelled hollowly down the stairs. "You there? The Chief says lock Collins if you ain't already and c'mere."

Soon, my private cell acquired a couple of unmatched eyes at the peek-a-boo slot so they'd recognize me again. I felt myself giggling and pulled the blanket over my face. I was to be tailed, therefore, let out. The door clacked open.

"Rip," Beardon blurted, swaying a little, "the Chief's decided you're only a ping-pong ball in this case, not worth saving. Here's a suit that may fit you."

"Haw," I laughed, standing up eight or nine feet tall. "This is a dead man's suit. The cleaner did a good job sewing up these holes in the lapel." I struggled into the expensive brown check trousers. "Good fit. But how come Loe is not here to give me Y.M.C.A. lecture number ninety-nine? He job-hunting again? Between Henry Morgan and those hungry newspapers, he better be. Wales is no dead bum in the park. Bye-bye, Beardon."

The alley leading from the cell-block was dazzling bright. In my coat pocket, my hand found a dollar bill, and I rubbed my chin. Needed a shave. I was coming to the package liquor store at the end of the alley, thinking: *What gives with Loe, all of a sudden a philanthropist? Down boy, don't go in there.*

When I walked reluctantly into the beguiling crystal entrance of the liquor store, to my astonish-

ment, Chief Loe was staked-out there. "Do youah old friend a favor, Rip. Don't go in."

"You haven't got much faith in me," I blurted in angry surprise. "I was just looking. I got better things to do!"

"Youah thinks that Browne is responsible fouah your buddy's death?"

"Up to your old tricks," I gritted. "Takes a thief to catch a thief and so forth. You want me to blunder around, looking for revenge, and get shot. Reasoning: you figure whoever intended for me to shoot down Wales, me being unconscious at the time, has since figured I was tipped off, that I planted my coat on Crackers to let him take the bullets. Therefore, the big toad who planned this deal thinks I know more than I do, and he knows me for a trouble-maker from way back. To protect himself he's going to have me bumped. All you have to do is tail me and grab the bumper and you're hot on the main trail. Only I'll be too dead to congratulate the mighty Chief Loe. Nothing doing!"

Loe's face shrank a little thinner. "Aw now, Rip, Ah'm waiting fouah New York Homicide to check which professionals just been south. But Ah thought you'd like to know; one of my pigeons says Grunemadd's boy, Mike Railley, been making secret talk with Browne.—But Ah got no intention of you getting killed."

"Thank you, General MacArthur!" I walked down the main drag like a sailor, rolling from foot to foot and looking for a bar. Over my shoulder I caught Loe still standing there, small, discouraged and gray, as I ducked into Jockey Jerome's, showed him my dollar.

"You owe me thirty or forty of those," the jockey squeaked, but I think he would have poured me one, only a big, fat hand slapped down on the mahogany. It turned palm up, showing a badge, and the plainclothesman growled: "Nothing for this lush today, Jock."

"I'll remember that," I told them both, and, walking fast, crossed the street as the light turned red, ducked into a five-and-ten and out the side entrance. With brakes squealing, drivers cursing I crossed in the middle of the block to Sheila's and ogled Sheila and her rows of shiny bottles. But then I heard my shadow breathing hard behind me. "Another day, Sheila-girl," I muttered and stalked past him to the curb; I was being persecuted by the police, but I knew there was more to it than that.

At the corner, I slipped through the pneumatic door of the bus as it closed, and waved bye-bye. A dime's worth toward the river, I got off at the Seaman's Anchor, which contained familiar faces, bums; no sailors here since the big stabbing two years ago.

I barely made it to the bar, feeling woozy. I knew Chief Loe didn't want me to get soused out, because he needed me, he wanted me to scurry around until I got shot. But I was going to hop a freight.

I'm not going to help you, Loe, I thought. *You never gave me a cent when I was down and out, and now you try to keep me from buying a drink. You were the wise guy who had me locked up in that private cure-all sanatorium,* "and what happens, I come out dry, dry in the head and bump heads with the D.A. Very smart, investigating Wales and Grunemadd, like investigating a tiger's back teeth. I deserve to lose my license."

"What did you say, bud?" the lush next to me mumbled.

"Nothing to you, let's have a little service here!" The pug bartender was trying very hard not to see me. My knees began to fold and I wondered vaguely how long it had been since I ate. That made me feel sicker, the thought of food, but something had happened to my body chemistry; I didn't want that drink any more. "Hey, Canvasback, a fish sandwich, huh?"

He stood there, scratching beneath his cauliflower ear.

"Get over your surprise," I said. "I eat as well as drink."

"Duh, I can't serve you. Lil' while ago the phone is really ringin'. Cops. He asts if I know Rip Collins. I says maybe. He says if I sell you anything, I get closed up."

"He meant whiskey, not sandwiches, you fall-guy. My order is a fish sandwich, and I got money to prove it!"

"He says not to serve you nothin'." And when I insisted on my rights the ignorant pug gave me the bum's rush!

As I crawled over to the lamp post to pull myself erect, I spotted a young man, neatly dressed, step backward around the corner. So they used radio cars and I had a new tail, I thought sourly. "Well, I'll give you shadow lessons, sonny boy."

But I was in no condition. He was still with me when I walked between the pillars of the great bridge that swoops upward, over the antique buildings and high above the river. Among the heavy shadows of the main girders, against the fish sheds, leaned shabby men who would sell me a fruit jar of corn or Pink Lady if I could only shake this cop. What Loe didn't understand was that even if I wanted to help him I couldn't unless I was pretty well fueled.

My feet were dragging and my heart was pounding so that I was near being an ambulance case. I didn't want a drink, but I had to have one, and fast. I could feel my cheek twitching as I shambled into the Number 9 shed, through the semi-darkness, along the creak-

ing boards. Where they were gone, the river rolled bronze and silver and shadowy, waiting for drunks.

When my tail had had time to take a look-see and step back as I turned, I put my head into an empty fish box from the top of the pile and screamed, dropping the box into the river. A nice, hollow scream, a nice, hollow splash, I shrank quickly behind the boxes and listened to his thudding feet. When he knelt at the edge of the boards, bending in to see if I had managed to grab a piling a little way downstream, I put my foot to his behind. The powerful way he splashed and yet had breath for cursing showed he had not forgotten his Police School swimming lessons.

It didn't take me long to locate a poor man's bootlegger, and I ran heavily up an alley with my jar of corn and crouched behind a garbage can to do my drinking in seclusion. The cops were undoubtedly radioing back and forth between their cars by now, wondering where in hell I'd gone to. I had an uneasy feeling on the back of my neck that someone else was looking for me, too. But after a couple of long, scalding gushes of corn, setting my stomach to grumbling like a volcano, starting the heat flowing in my veins, chemical courage, I didn't give a damn. I was Rip Collins, Ripper Collins, bigshot investigator and local political muscle, razor-sharp brain and bullet-proof skin; I was anything I wanted to be. "Say your prayers, boys; here I come," I muttered, but I squatted there, drinking.

The real trick, I thought, *isn't to find out who got Crackers killed and grind my heel in his face. It's to let go of this bottle before I pass out.* I took a smaller mouthful and swished it around in my cheek. It seemed wasteful not to swallow it.

Over the top of the garbage can, over the top of the laundry across the street, I could see that arrogant brick building, five stories high, with its spider-web shadows from the bridge cables contrasting with the diamond glint of the big picture windows on its top floor. I knew if I crossed the street, walked one block, turned half a block right, I would be standing close, looking up at that insulting pile of brick, at that new brass plate over the entrance, ornate with brass olive-leaf clusters, shades of Mussolini, what confident gall! THE GRUNEMADD BUILDING.

I took a good healthy swallow. There was something about that little cherub Grunemadd's round and beaming face I couldn't stand. "You damn Cheshire Cat!"

The drainpipe across the alley began to wriggle lazily up the wall. *But there's no reason for Grunemadd to have the D.A. gunned,* I thought. *Wales is the reason Grunemadd is where he is*

today, a prosperous business man, hah! Browne is the boy they've been pushing into a corner till he's ready to risk violence. He figures when they get his bolita runners out of the business district, they won't stop there. Grunemadd will find himself a boy-Friday and muscle into uptown.

Studying the silhouetted bridge, I let a trickle of corn run down my throat. *Browne is the boy I should be visiting. A little while ago, when I did the photo job for his lawyer, we were pals. Now we'll see what his expression is. If he was the one who hired those New York gunmen to frame me, dead, he's not going to be too happy meeting me face to face.*

"He'll think he's been squealed on, dead to rights," I laughed, "that I've come to kill him!"

I pictured all his strong-boys popping up around me, and quick-firing their revolvers like Fourth of July. It didn't worry me a bit. I was invulnerable. But I couldn't stand up.

If I throw away this jar of gut-acid, I'll be lighter, I mused. But I couldn't do it. I took a little swig and watched that drainpipe snake up the wall. And very cautiously, so that I wouldn't disagree with what I was doing, I hid the rest of the jar of corn behind the garbage can. It would give me strength, knowing it was there to come back to.

Crawling across the alley, I climbed the drainpipe until I was standing on my feet. By the time I reached the sidewalk, I wondered where I was going. "Got no bus fare to get me to uptown, huh. Grunemadd's no good for a touch, throw me out, huh. What am I doing by the river? Going to see Grunemadd and tell him what I think of him! Squeezing my—my town!"

I knew there was something else I wanted to tell him, but I couldn't think what it was as I wandered across the street, down the block, turned the corner and squinted up at that shiny brass plaque. THE GRUNEMADD BUILDING.

A newsboy grinned at me, long-headed kid, and Crackers' face appeared. "Murderersh!" I yelled, and the boy jumped three feet. I guessed I'd better keep my mouth shut; I had better things to do than a trip to the observation ward.

Above my head, traffic roared and hooted on the bridge, five stories up, on a level with the shimmering glass of Grunemadd's office and penthouse floor, and I had a disturbing thought. *Suppose Grunemadd's up there dead? Wales and he were like siamese twins, controlling the town together. If some new mob wanted to beef their way in, they'd kill both. Without our little cherub, this city can be in for some bloody old gang wars, yeah bo!*

"We shall see what we shall see!" I lurched boldly into the

lobby of Grunemadd's hotel for thugs, storehouse for slot-machines, telephone jungle for bookies, offices for operations illegal and legit. I could have used another stiff one. For the lobby was as empty as a dice room the minute before the cops arrive. The sofas and over-stuffed chairs of the local political fixers, ward-heelers, loungers, New York exiles and prominent horse-players were empty. The bar was locked up. The flies buzzed loudly, while I tried to make out who was sighting a gun on me through the wall ventilator grill.

When I leaned on the reception-desk buzzer, one of Grunemadd's fronts, a florid, Kentucky Colonel sort of fellow, stepped jerkily from a side door and paused on the balls of his feet, regarding me as though I was a bomb with the fuse burning short. His lips parted but he didn't make any noise.

"I have uh hot infer-informatip for your boss," I heard my voice laugh.

His lips made a round O beneath his pepper-and-salt mustache, and he picked up the house-phone, talking into it behind his hand. When his head began nodding like a pump-handle, I knew some big toad was still full of life and giving orders. I draped against a pillar and watched the arrow-indicator above the elevator entry unwind.

The elevator "boy" frisked me until I began to know how a girl feels when enough is enough. But I felt a little surprised, too; it seemed unbelievable that Ripper Collins wasn't carrying hardware. It was hard to remember that I was only Rip the Bum.

The elevator accelerated with my stomach trailing behind, and the "boy" let me walk in front of him to that impressive mahogany-parquet door on the fifth floor, which opened itself, apparently. Inside it was surprisingly dark as I peered across the vista of antique furniture, oriental rugs, buxom Greek statuary and stuffed flamingoes to the abruptly modernistic leather and chromium desk that underlined Mr. Grunemadd's shiny, bald scalp. He was smiling contentedly at his glossy finger-tips. Eventually he bothered to glance up at me.

No one said anything.

Over his shoulder stood Mike Railley, his number-one boy, a dull-witted New York black-Irishman with a darkly handsome face as puzzled as a monkey's its first day at the zoo.

Behind my back I heard the door close.

I could see why the room was so dark. The big, curving picture window that had looked out at the bridge traffic was boarded, shards of broken glass still glinted on the rug, and above and to the right of Grunemadd's scalp was an oval crater in the plaster. I was conscious how markedly I was

swaying, how drunk I must be, and I watched that cherub's smile curve upward. I couldn't remember what I was supposed to say.

"Ah hah," Grunemadd exhaled. "Can be you are wanting to work for me, now the plot has failed? Of cawss you can't. Drunks, they are not dependable, no? Horrid stuff you fellows drink! You don't know whether you're standing up or laying down. Look at Mike here. He don't drink excessive and look where it's got him." This last carried a faint undertone of sarcasm.

Grunemadd's smile swivelled around. The phone jangled, and the young Irishman stiffened as though someone had put a finger to his back. His hand jumped at the phone like a cornered octopus. When he'd listened a moment, he blurted: "Like I said, Mr. Grunemadd, this bum has cops covering him. There's a dick in the coffee shop across the street."

"They don't touch me," Grunemadd muttered, trying to sound happy. "They're my friends. Even that Chief Loe knows what's good for the city. This new D.A., I don't know, but I do know he's gonna' want to get re-elected. See, I told you he'd call off the raid when it gets around I'm still alive. You're nervous, Mike."

And so was he. A mobster like Grunemadd wouldn't trust his own mother to give him birth; he'd kick out Morse code for some gunman to hold a gun on her head to make sure she didn't change her mind. I had to laugh; I remembered what I was going to say, and I had to admire Chief Loe. Here I was doing just what he'd intended me to. I was another pawn on his chessboard.

"Say something, you," Grunemadd said smoothly. "When you say something? You too drunk to talk? You come up here to put the touch on me? Yes? You forget, you the bum who made all the trouble for me last election? I'm no philanthropy."

"Where ish everybody?" I managed obliquely.

"Where is everybody?" he echoed. "They'll be back for more cheese." He shrugged. "Tomorrow maybe. But you, you sure you in the right building?"

"You should've had bullet-proof glash."

"No, no;" he waved his hand, smiling again. "Glass don't stop high-power rifle bullets. Curviness makes them miss, yes?"

"You mean dish-tish-tortion from curve windowsh." My tongue was thick, but I was sharpening upstairs; I knew how I was going to play this for both me and Chief Loe.

"Yes, yes," he said. "I'm lucky, no? Last night they pop at me from the bridge with a rifle and I climb under my desk crying, 'What have I done to deserve this? Someone is not very civic-minded.' "

"My friendsh don't like me

either," I replied. "Now I'm gonna' tell you something thatsh worth money. You decide how much. I was scheduled to shoot Walesh."

He shrugged.

"Only I wass tipped off," I added. "The man says, 'Mike Railley has picked you for the sacra-fice-ficel sheep!' "

"I beg your pahdon?" Grunemadd exclaimed, while Mike's cheek twitched as if I was using it to stub out a cigarette.

"So I got shmart and loan my raincoat to Crackersh, see, cause I hear around that Browne and Mike been having talksh, and all that fits. They get rid of you. They get rid of Walesh. What better man to get rid of Wales than me, who been saying I'm going to get him? So I loan my raincoat to Crackers. Dig me?"

Mike's face was the color of cheap red wine, as he stepped forward.

"Course," I suggested slyly, "Mike is doing this on your ordersh?"

To my surprise and chagrin, Grunemadd squeaked: "Troublemaking lush! Don't dirty your hands on him, Mike. He's a drunk after a handout. Any lie for a drink."

Mike and I stood chest to chest on the oriental rug, breathing hard, while Grunemadd began to laugh squeakily like a mouse in a roomful of cheese. "Fine trick for a drink, eh Collins? Even in the gutter you play all or nothing. I think you've earned something for effort." He opened a desk drawer and smilingly drew out, not a gun, but a ten-dollar bill and smoothed it both ways. "For that you testify to anything, no?"

I tried to step around Mike for the ten-spot, but he moved with me, wheezing; his face said he was going to kill me, that I had hurt his feelings, that he didn't like the odor of my breath. I had to snicker, though it was my head on the chopping block; this was not the first time one of Loe's informants had manufactured some really high-priced pigeon droppings. Then again, they could still be pure gold.

Grunemadd stood up behind his desk, which didn't make him much taller, and pushed forward some sort of large, horizontal bottle. "You can play with this bum later, Mike.—Now I want to make a speech. This bottle isn't for drinking, Collins. I want to say you been one of the mugs which is wrong with this city. You been a troublemaker, a stoolie from the word go."

"Proud to be of shervice," I laughed, edging toward the ten-spot and also curiously eyeing that bottle; it lay on a carved wood cradle as though it should contain a model clipper ship.

"I want to say, Collins, that I got this city's interests at heart. Look at my little city in the bottle"; bulging eyes, passionately

open lips, he stared at the miniature city with an expression that would have seemed normal if he were staring at a beautiful chorus girl stark naked on his bed. "A perfect little city, all neat and in order, with little people and houses and trees, everything where it should be. That's the way we all want the city to be, orderly. That's why I like looking at this bottle, yes, yes. But troublemakers such as you, always trying dig things up. Collins, if this was Heaven you'd be yapping that a brick was missing from the Golden Streets. You'd blow us all to Hell, just to find that one brick!"

I stared at the model city in the bottle, but the ten-spot was more impressive.

"With a ten, you can skip this town," Grunemadd said, solemn as a fat man at his mother's funeral. "I want to say, Wales was my friend. He run a quiet city, and I'm not lightly taking his death. But you stop making trouble, you stop playing spy for certain soreheads in the Police Department, or I'll squash you like an ant trying to get in my bottle."

He took a big breath to say more, but my attention span is even shorter drunk than sober, and I laughed, which froze him like I'd hurt his feelings.

"For anyone else," I said, "a city in a bottle is a curio. For you, it's bughouse bait. You should crawl inside and find eternal happiness."

I took the moment while he sputtered, his eyebrows high and uncomprehending, to capture those ten bucks and lurch toward the door. "Bye, bye, Mike," I said. "Touch me and I'll stain his oriental rug."

I came out of THE GRUNEMADD BUILDING softly laughing, my fingers chafing on that ten-spot. On the plate glass window of the liquor store across the street my reflection got bigger and bigger until my face grinned back at me like Satan's, fogging the glass. *Ten dollars will buy me enough revolver to hole that high-and-mighty pair,* I thought, feeling high as Jupiter myself, the god, not the planet. *Ten dollars will smash his lousy bottle, let the air in to his model city.*

But those were some mighty pretty bottles behind the liquor store window-glass. *After coming out of the lion's den, I deserve some good stuff,* I rationalized, *and those two didn't shape up any guiltier than anyone else in this town. I've got to lay bigger traps, and for that Rip Collins needs fuel.*

Inside, I discovered, to my pleasure, fifths of bourbon which, if I bought two instead of one, would leave me exactly the bus-fare I needed to get uptown. I couldn't pass up a deal like that, and on the bus I held them tight against my chest so they wouldn't clink, in deference to the lady passengers, and chuckled because not

only was I wearing a dead man's suit, I lacked bus fare to get back.

I wondered if I had put a flea in Grunemadd's ear; even if Mike had been faithful as Old Dog Tray, Grunemadd would be wondering. And I wondered whether Grunemadd did have a motive for rubbing the D.A.; for instance, Wales might have raised his price too high. Bre'r Browne might drop a few pearls on that score, being as how the D.A.'s office had janitors with big ears, and Wales himself had a cook from uptown. But Bre'r Browne might also drop me in the river, for a number of reasons.

The bus went no farther than Nineteenth, for reasons of city politics, and I walked beneath the noon sun, heavy-footed, light-headed and watching for a car to slow down; the moonlike faces of that pale pair, or Mike and one of Grunemadd's torpedoes, or even Chief Loe and Lt. Beardon, who could guess? I did know I was wearing my tail again, a blocky yokel in a light suit who changed the shape of his hat every couple of blocks and even turned his coat inside out, giving a brown sport-coat effect from that distance; he thought he was pretty tricky, a regular chameleon.

A gal glanced at me strangely and I realized all the faces had become darker than mine. Past rows of apartment houses with gay window-boxes and big new cars parked out in front, I trudged with tan faces, brown faces, black faces glinting curiously in my direction. This was the section of town where their doctors, lawyers, merchants lived, and no one would molest me. But gradually the homes blended with grocery stores, fish stores, liquor stores, anonymous cafes; and confident young bucks lounged on rooming-house steps, interrogating me with their eyes.

Old houses, unpainted, with sagging porches and sun-warped scroll work that was considered quite elegant back about 1900, gave way to shed-roofed hovels with coal-oil lanterns on the window sills. Children scampered and whirled like leaves in the wind, shouting: "White man, white man," as though I was a freakish, probably dangerous beast from interstellar space.

A block behind me I could hear them shouting, too. I had to smile. My police tail was shortening the distance between us as if in mutual defense. We were out of bounds, on foreign soil. If you get in trouble uptown, white boy, that's just too bad; the police attitude is that you shouldn't have been there. Segregation is a two-way proposition.

Browne's DELUXE MEETING HALL had the lights on, even in the daytime, and upstairs, staring moodily out the window with his white poll making him look deceptively like Massa's most faithful retainer, was Browne. He

spotted me, at least he stepped behind the curtain quickly enough. This made me wonder if he was the boy with the guilty conscience.

When I peered in the main entrance, a man with the quick grace of a rhino barred my path. "You ain't wanted in heah, Mistuh Collins."

"I want to talk to Browne."

"You been paid. Theah is no cause for you bein' heah."

"I've got news for Browne."

"Ah've got news for you. Mistuh Browne ain't in."

I shrugged, clinking my bottles, and ambled around to the window. "Hey, Browne," I yelled. "Grunemadd has a message for you."

Inside, the dice stopped rattling. The rhino started toward me with a sawed-off pool cue looking no bigger than a pencil in his fist. To avoid breakage to my bottles, I circled prudently across the street.

"Looka' out!" the rhino bellowed.

I ducked into the cover of a hole-in-the-wall fish store as a coupe squealed its tires against the curb. With blacking on his handsome face, Mike Railley still looked exactly like Mike Railley as he lunged from the car with a glint of metal projecting from his fist. There was a heart-stopping click-click-click as I bellied heavily over the counter. As I rolled over on the sawdust, I heard his feet coming and tried to run out the back way, colliding with a woman in a bloody apron who picked that moment to wake up with a screech. My bottles went one way; I landed on my hip in a basket of fish, threw up my hand, a fine way to stop a bullet. His face loomed across the counter, twitching with each violent click of the trigger.

"Lying, stinkin' Grunemadd," he screamed, hurling the doctored gun at my head, and came over after it, gasping and sobbing as if his entire world had come apart.

I got up from the basket with my fist around the tail of one of the river catfish that the woman should have been cleaning. Its horned head was as big and heavy as a bulldog's, with a spiked collar on, and the body whipped like a leather blackjack handle as I clubbed his enlarging face. He staggered backward against the counter. As he warded off my next blow with his forearms, I kicked him where it hurts, doubling him forward, and slammed the fish to the back of his head. My knee came up and I felt his nose collapse. As his head snapped back, I sidearmed the catfish head against his cheek. He slid sideways from the counter and I landed another, feeling the gill spines rake his flesh, before he hit the sawdust, where I crowded over him, bludgeoning with diminishing strength as he began to crawl.

Every time I landed that fish on the back of his head, his face root-

ed into the sawdust to his eyes. He groped for my ankles, and I stumbled back, slamming down the horned head on his wrist. His face lurched up, black and scarlet and sawdust-freckled, giving me a target to swing that ugly fish underhand like a golf club. It bounced back, leaving him with a bloody, corpselike grin I would have driven into the sawdust, but my police tail had an arm-lock on me. I couldn't hold the fish and fell to my knees with the room shimmering.

The counter was lining with angry brown faces. As they started climbing over, I saw a spidery man with a bebop goatee lift a safety razor blade from his hatband. The sound of the mob became an angry animal growl. My plainclothesman was yelling shrilly for them to keep back and flashing his badge. I crawled over and rubbed my handkerchief across Mike's stunned and bleeding face, saving us from being mobbed. The cry: "He's another white man blacked up," swept backward through the crowd and they milled around, looking sheepish, curious, giggling.

Browne's pet rhino leaned over the counter. As he stared at Mike, I saw his forehead wrinkle upward in startled recognition. He ducked away through the crowd fast.

By the time the plaincolthesman, my tail, had telephoned for a radio car I could see Browne's "boys" running from the meeting hall across the street like rats from a sinking garbage scow. The plainclothesman hauled Mike erect and started him around the counter.

"Hey, don't take him out to the curb," I gasped.

"Well, there's a car coming for us," the dick replied innocently.

Mike made a whimpering sound and tried to twist out of the plainclothesman's arms. They teetered, interlocked like a couple at the last dance. When the rifle exploded somewhere with a high-velocity crack, there was a tinkle of glass and a simultaneous splat against the wall above my head. A chunk of Mike's head was gone. It came dripping down the wall. The plainclothesman fell away from the corpse, clawing for his gun, and crouched behind the counter with me, wheezing, and I didn't make any jocular remarks.

I retrieved Mike's gun, but something had been done to the firing pin; I couldn't fix it with a pencil and an ice pick. I had a feeling, however, that the rifleman had done his job and was lamming out of there by now. I backed up my intuition with a peek over the counter, in time to see Browne doing a solo down the meeting hall steps to his limousine. He wasn't waiting for his chauffeur, or vice versa. The trouble with me, so many pieces of the puzzle were fitting together I

felt a hotly confident wave of being Ye Olde Rip Collins again, and pounded out into the street, dud gun in one hand, icepick in the other.

As Browne got in one door of the car, I got in the other, and I was in the driver's seat. Browne managed a sickly smile. I laughed. I knew he was too smart to carry a gun. I cuddled up beside him with the icepick against his belly-button.

"Mistuh Browne," I panted, "you just stay close to me now and signal your boys not to try anymore fancy shooting. You and I know your lawyers are more dependable."

Once a surprising host of radio cars had extricated us from there, and we were driving out through police roadblocks toward the City Hall-County Courthouse again, I had a sinking feeling, as though my last pint of blood was leaking out; my two fifths of bourbon were still back there on that sawdust floor and I'd never see them again.

"This deal still doesn't add up," I told Chief Loe as I sagged into an easy chair in his office, my nerves twisting, my head clear and hurried, my tongue magically limber, agile enough for my thoughts again as if I was the old Rip Collins, the big-operator. "Yeah, it's plain the two who grabbed Crackers and gunned Wales were uptown muscle. I was considering that even before Mike did the reverse and attacked me black-face. He had no brains of his own; if he'd had imagination, Grunemadd never would have dared raise him to a position of power. I bet the only reason black-face occurred to him was because he knew those two gunmen had gone white-face with zinc oxide. The chemist did tag it zinc oxide, didn't he?"

Chief Loe nodded cautiously as if he was listening for something to explode somewhere back in the cell-blocks.

"Yeah, Mike had a deal with Browne," I rushed. "Eliminate Wales and Grunemadd, and he'd take over Grunemadd's function and let Browne regain his bolita business, maybe a cash payment to Browne besides. But who brought them together? Who arbitrated? I don't even think those two were capable of cooking such a neat murder scheme. Number-three did that!"

Chief Loe ducked his gray head, he scratched his greasy suit front. "We is going to run a show-up on all the boys we grabbed on theah way out of there. An Henry Morgan will be theah; he is back and talking to Browne in his cell right now. You think you can recognize the boy who throwed you?"

I laughed. "O.K., change the subject. I can identify him if you nudge me. I trust you help the witness as though I was any honest and unobserving citizen?"

"We found one of them," Chief Loe sighed, "by going down the line testing fouah zinc oxide in theah pores. Has a record, and used to work as a rubbah in a turkish bath. Ah'll nudge you when the spotlight hits him."

"He won't even know who paid him," I laughed. "But Browne, if the bail is set so high he knows he's stuck and you get him all alone without his lawyers, you won't even need to work him over. That old man's afraid of pain. He'll lie until you piece out the whole story."

Chief Loe nodded, not looking very happy for a cop who was cracking the most newsworthy crime in years. "Shuah, he's the stah witness. Ah want to thank you, Rip. Ah'll send out fouah a bottle after you recognize that gunman."

A cop stuck his head in the door, we got up and went into the hollow-noisy hall, where I was relieved to see a crowd of newspapermen. While a sergeant put a new globe in the spotlight, Henry Morgan expanded to the reporters, demonstrating with his hands how the invincible forces of the law had closed in.

"I've finally backed Browne in a corner," his voice came shrilly, and his horn-rimmed glasses flashed like mirrors, "which is something preceding District Attorneys failed to accomplish. I've talked to the judge, and even all of uptown won't be able to make Browne's bail. When I left that racketeer, he was wringing his hands and snivelling like a little old lady. I complimented him on a fiendishly clever plan for eliminating Mr. Wales, which it was, if I hadn't seen through it, and he giggled hysterically. I wouldn't be surprised if he was considering an insanity plea."

Henry Morgan raised his eyebrows. He swooped his hand backward through his corkscrew red hair. "Insanity would be laughed out of court. And yet, it may well be, the abrupt end of his illegal empire is proving too much for him. Such power-mad criminal types always walk the thin edge of insanity. I have half a mind to telephone the County Hospital for a strait-jacket."

His glasses blazed as the spotlight came on. A chorus line of hoodlums slouched across the stage. The spotlight began at the left with the spidery guy with the bebop goatee. "Take off your hat," the sergeant's voice grated through the microphone.

They all looked both familiar and unfamiliar until the light searched out burly number-five and the chief nudged me; nothing like a hint to jog the witness' memory.

"That's him," I exclaimed brightly. "One of them."

The examination continued and I couldn't find the other one, which was to be expected, since only one of these had been dis-

covered to carry traces of zinc oxide. And finally the lights in the hall brightened, revealing the red-haired squirt sourly examining his fingernails.

Damn you, I thought, *you've had everything your own way. Can't you at least look happy about it?*

A Vice-Squad sergeant was suddenly at his shoulder, whispering with breathless hissing sounds. He stood up, his domed forehead gleaming, and raised his hand.

"Gentlemen, I have an unfortunate announcement to make. I stand fully responsible. I should have had Browne put in a padded cell. This sergeant reports that while we were having this show-up, Browne suddenly began to laugh and scream. Before they could unlock his cell and restrain him, he beat his head repeatedly against the bars. Browne is dead."

I laughed in my throat and kicked the chair in front of me. Chief Loe swiped his forearm across his brow. Above the tumult, Henry Morgan shrilled: "I wish to report however that the department has done a great job. Most of Browne's accomplices have been picked up. Additional arrests will follow. And the case is as complete as we could have made it had Browne remained alive to testify."

A few of the more knowledgeable reporters laughed or indulged in frustrated swear words, and one old-timer shouted: "And whose names would he have mentioned? In this city it happens every time. The last witness had four detectives guarding him and yet he managed to hang himself with his belt. Yeah, we got a great city administration!"

"Quiet please, quiet," Henry Morgan cried. "We all resent such unfounded vilification. The Force does a great job with very little help from the citizenry. How about a hand for them?"

"Sure they do," I shouted, "and they've been getting the back of the hand from the D.A.'s office."

"Shut that dipsomaniac up," the red-head snapped.

Chief Loe shrugged, the reporters quieted, grinning at me; during the battle of Wales' re-election I had thrown them plenty of front page news, and they leaned forward as though it was the old Rip Collins, the sharp-eyed op, who was going to kick some more cats out of the bag.

I clutched the chair in front of me to keep from pitching forward. Their faces blurred, elongating as if they were watching me through a bottle of wine, and my ears hummed; the fear that I was going to pass out made the sweat come, and a rising bubble of gas from my stomach wouldn't let me speak. A few of them tittered nervously. I could feel their attention slipping and tried to speak anyway and made a croak-

ing noise. Their laughter began. It was as unreal as a nightmare. I was losing them.

"You all know as well as I do," I managed, and then that belch came rumbling out and they laughed hopelessly, beginning to turn away. "Awright you pencil-pushers," I yelled, "you been mighty fancy watchdogs for this city. As soon as Wales beat you and got re-elected, you gave up and went back to digging your news out of the baseball scores. You know as well as I do what's happened to this city, and if there is a man here who believes Browne beat out his brains all by his little lone self, he should have his own examined. It can be proved, too, if you put the screws on for an outside medical examiner to perform the autopsy instead of that big-bellied politician who calls himself the County Coroner."

"Now one of you asked our public servant," I said, thrusting a forefinger toward Henry Morgan's angry face, "what Browne would have testified. And I'll tell you. Not a thing, until plodding police work traced down his boy who fired a rifle bullet through Mike Railley's head, until his only choice was become a state's witness to dodge the noose. Then Browne would say it was Mike who cooked up the idea of two of his boys going white-face to gun Wales."

I quickly reviewed what a neat little scheme it had been, though a floperoo due to clumsy handling—, Crackers grabbed instead of me and then slugged too hard. "And Browne's rifleman, shooting from the bridge, failed to compensate for the distortion in Grunemadd's curved window glass and missed him, the other half of the combine."

They jabbered at that; they knew Grunemadd was Wales' better half, but not that he'd been fired on.

"Yeah," I shouted, "this city was going to have a complete palace revolution. Mike Railley would have taken over Grunemadd's organization, probably giving back Browne's bolita privileges plus a cash payment for providing the gunmen. Up on the top floor of THE GRUNEMADD BUILDING, you know who is sitting smiling at his fingernails. Chief Loe was tipped that Mike was dickering with Browne. Grunemadd also knows the score. He sent Mike after me with a dud gun, figuring I'd pick up one of my own, figuring I'd plug Mike in self-defense and save him the risk of another execution.

"When Browne learned a cop had Mike, he told his rifleman to close his mouth. Poor old Browne was worrying three ways; Mike could talk, Grunemadd could get revenge and, worst of all, number-three would also be scared and feel he had to shut Browne up.

You pencil-pushers look sort of stupid and stunned when I say number-three. But this was a three-way deal. It had to be. Mike's and Browne's empire-building would come to nought unless they had their protection arranged. Wales was Grunemadd's protection. Who would be their's?"

I blinked at them, raising my hand to my cheek to stop its trembling. Beside me, Chief Loe was loudly, nervously scratching his coat-front. It was hot in that hall.

"Let's look at this another way," I laughed. "There is indirect evidence of a number-three because Bre't Browne and Mike were members of hostile organizations, without overlap. Grunemadd has the equivalent of secret police. Mike could hardly risk making first overtures. Browne would need a go-between to deal with the enemy. O.K., so our number-three functioned as messenger boy. But Browne and Mike would have to divide up their world in advance, and they're both greedy. So our number-three would also serve as arbitrator. To effectively arbitrate, one would suspect he held a certain balance of power, that Browne and Mike each believed number-three would influence the other to live up to his part of the agreement. An arbitrator among racketeers usually has a good deal of weight of his own. Number-three is no patrolman pounding a beat."

Someone coughed hollowly.

"Let's examine this from still a third direction," I said. "The scheme to eliminate Wales and Grunemadd was a thing of beautiful intricacy; closely timed, a long range shot, plus untraceable murder by means of a dead man, me. The originator was an ingenious fellow. A scientist of murder. That excuses Mike, nothing subtle about him, strictly a low I.Q. Now, Browne was a brighter mug, but up till now he's bought murders of the crudest sort, strictly boom-boom and run. Why change? He's old, he's set in his ways. So it's likely that number-three conceived this novel scheme."

Lt. Beardon eased toward the door. The red-head's horn-rimmed glasses flashed. Beside me, Chief Loe was scratching harshly. I couldn't help smiling; it was nice to be the center of attention again.

"We've looked for number-three from three directions," I chuckled. "Like three roads they come together. In the middle of the cross-roads are number-three's motives. Most of us want power, money and so forth, but number-three wanted them so badly he tried to turn his wildest day-dreams into reality. And he was spurred because, having already talked bigger than he was, he must act quickly. He was about to lose his position of potential

power. He was about to be canned."

"So, he went to Mike and to Browne. He was in a position to know Mike was restless, that Browne was being hounded toward murder anyway. He offered his grand scheme for a palace revolution, and the tactical means for achieving it, the two murder plans. He assured them, all he'd have to do to be appointed Acting District Attorney would be to fly to the State Capitol and ask."

"I'm surprised," Henry Morgan's voice shrilled out with more courage than I'd expected, "that you gentlemen are bothering to take notes. This is libelous material from an irresponsible source."

He knew there was no case against him, yet. But I knew the police would begin their plodding, bumbling, relentless hunt. Little things would turn up, safety-vaults would be opened, minor hoodlums badgered, pigeons interviewed and re-interviewed. The flat feet of cops would trudge from one drugstore to another, any place where zinc oxide is sold. And one by one Browne's boys would be hunted out and worked over; some of them must have seen the Assistant D.A. with their boss; if not, they might remember it anyway. Laboriously, a case would be built.

"One question," I called. "Who guarded Browne?"

"Masterson and Soldavini," Henry Morgan replied calmly.

"Significantly, sergeants on the Vice-Squad," I laughed. "They don't ask questions, they just have fun. I guess you'd say they were under your orders?"

"Mr. Loe is Chief of Police," he retorted.

"Yes, but—," I laughed. "Do you remember early this morning when they dragged me into the D.A.'s office, and you were behind Wales' desk? You stared at those white smears on my shirt and, on the way out the door to catch your plane, you said: 'Burn them, delouse him.' Why should you even look twice at white filth on a bum's chest?"

"I won't subject myself to any more of this," Henry Morgan shrilled. "Eject him from this building." He turned on his heel and marched like a little Napoleon from the hall.

"The funny part about this," Lt. Beardon said "is the Governor didn't make him D.A. or even Acting D.A. He's still Assistant D.A. The Governor has bigger yaps who rate the patronage."

I didn't laugh. "How about that bottle, Chief?"

It was good stuff, and locked in a hotel room, where they stored me handy to appear before the Grand Jury, I laid back and drank it down like a baby with his bottle. Crackers' long, dolefully innocent face drifted across the ceiling, and I wished he would get

those other bottles for me, the two on the sawdust in the fish store, but they'd be gone. The ceiling billowed and shimmered like the ocean, and I knew where another bottle was, behind the garbage can, a jar of corn, with the bridge traffic roaring overhead, toward THE GRUNEMADD BUILDING, and Mr. Grunemadd would be staring at his bottle the same way I was staring at mine, each of us wondering what was going to become of us—

HAVE YOU A COMPLETE FILE OF THE saint?

HERE is your opportunity to purchase back issues of THE SAINT. But—the first issue, we're sorry to say, is all sold out. A few copies are still available of all others and they are yours by filling in the coupon below. THE SAINT is always star-studded by the best writers in the field. We are now offering these at BARGAIN PRICES—single copies at 35¢; three copies at $1; six copies at $1.75; and twelve copies at $3.25. When ordering, circle the issues desired.

KING-SIZE PUBLICATIONS, Inc.
320 Fifth Avenue, New York 1, New York

Kindly send me the copies of THE SAINT whose issues I have circled below. One copy at 35¢, three copies at $1, six copies at $1.75, twelve copies at $3.25. I enclose $_____ in full payment—no additional charge for postage.

JAN. '54; MAY '54; JULY '54; SEPT. '54; OCT. '54; DEC. '54; JAN. '55; FEB. '55; MAR. '55; APR. '55; MAY '55; JUNE '55; JULY '55; AUG. '55; SEPT. '55; OCT. '55; NOV. '55; DEC. '55; JAN. '56; FEB. '56; MAR. '56; APR. '56; MAY '56; JULY '56; SEPT. '56; OCT. '56; NOV. '56; JAN. '57; FEB. '57; MAR. '57; APR. '57; MAY '57; JUNE '57; AUG. '57; SEPT. '57; OCT. '57; NOV. '57; DEC. '57; JAN. '58; FEB. '58; MAR. '58; APR. '58; MAY '58; JUNE '58; JULY '58; AUG. '58; SEPT. '58; OCT. '58; NOV. '58; DEC. '58; JAN. '59; FEB. '59; MAR. '59.

NAME_____

ADDRESS_____

CITY, ZONE, STATE_____

PLEASE PRINT SM 94

what's new in crime

by . . . Hans Stefan Santesson

Recent essays in the somewhat deadly arts — novels that you will wish to relax with, and others which reflect our times.

WHEN Mari Ruyter dances—men die.

Cornell Woolrich's interesting DEATH IS MY DANCING PARTNER (Pyramid, 35 cents) tells the story of this temple dancer who goes out into a world of disturbingly different values, a world in which, for what seems a brief moment, she is rich and successful and feared—*and* lonely. Do read this.

There is a hard crisp quality to the writing in Noel Clad's THE SAVAGE (Simon & Schuster, $2.95) which will interest you even if you find John Tree, full blooded Shoshone and war hero, slightly difficult to accept as a killer for the Syndicate. Perhaps the difficulty is that we have a preconceived picture of what a special "salesman" for the Syndicate must look like (blame Hollywood no doubt!) and rancher Tree—an intriguing personality —contradicts this picture. Don't miss this.

Margery Allingham's TETHER'S END (Doubleday, $3.50) is described, with a good deal of

Again comments on current mystery and suspense novels — by both British and American writers — novels which, in their variety, illustrate this column's frequent (perhaps too frequent) preachment that there is really no such thing as a simple definition of the mystery novel in these days.

justice, as "the most brilliant novel of her career." Miss Allingham, who has been voted one of the world's ten best mystery writers, gives us an impressive portrait of a thoroughly charming—and amoral man, a man who views murder as a regrettable necessity and hesitates only at the end when his safety demands that he kill the elderly woman who he knows would forgive him anything—even her death. Extremely interesting.

The publishers tell us that Kelley Roos' REQUIEM FOR A BLONDE (Dodd Mead, $2.95) "has the bubbling sparkle of a champagne cocktail." While this is perhaps a mild exaggeration, we do have here some lovely (and at times mildly wicked) portraits of a group of beautiful women who had at one time been in the Broadway musical, "Watch Out." Pleasant.

As I have said before, we have a tendency to talk a good deal—before turning to the sports pages—about what is so inadequately described as juvenile delinquency, but we make little effort to try to find out what makes these youngsters tick, why they *do* these things . . . The facts are of course there, buried in the reports of our understaffed and poorly supported social services, and shunted aside since these reports demand, instead of a big stick alternating with mollycoddling, an effort at understanding the *reasons* for a problem that has become a part of our times, both here and abroad.

Harlan Ellison, author of the forthcoming SOUND OF A SCYTHE (Ace) and of RUMBLE (Pyramid, 35 cents), has written a group of stories about this problem, based on personal observation. These stories in THE DEADLY STREETS (Ace, 35 cents) are far from pleasant, as the author warns in his introduction. "There's blood and unhappiness in these stories, and none of them are pretty; but then there's nothing pretty about life for these kids." These are stories you should read, however, if you want to understand a little better this afternoon's headlines. (And watch for Ellison's offbeat THE TIME OF THE EYE in next month's *Saint,* by the way.)

Erle Stanley Gardner has rarely had such an unpleasant—and eminently deserving—candidate for murder as Melvin Selkirk in his latest Perry Mason novel, THE CASE OF THE DEADLY TOY (Morrow, $2.95). Perry Mason gets involved as the representative of the girl friend of the deceased, soon accused of his murder, while the elder Selkirk and assorted other unpleasant people—including the real killer—make life difficult for Mason and his client. Characteristic

smooth Gardneriana. Do read this.

Edith Pargeter's THE ASSIZE OF THE DYING (Doubleday, $2.95) is actually two novelettes, the title story and AUNT HELEN. Both are perfect pastiches, set against an English background, literate, tense and excitingly told stories. Don't miss them.

When Richard Denning's wife falls to her death from a ninth story window, the police call it suicide. But Denning, remembering only the happiness they had shared, is convinced she has been murdered, and sets out to prove this in Manning Lee Stokes' effective THE IRON TIGER (Arcadia, $2.75). Do read this.

Guy Keeble kills to protect his son—to avoid alienating the only person he has ever really loved—but he finds that the first murder is insufficient. Kyle Hunt's KILL MY LOVE (Simon & Schuster, $2.95) tells the story of this man's dilemma, as he realizes he has gone down a path which has no turning. Interesting.

White-haired Don Cadee, Chief of Store Protection at Amblett's, fashionable 5th Avenue department store, returns in Spencer Dean's latest novel, THE MERCHANT OF MURDER (Doubleday, $2.95). Restaurateur Peter Baskoulos is a satisfyingly rugged and bad-tempered chief suspect, and his wife plays her role in the triangle with convincing efficiency. I predict, though, that another character, a fortune teller—an unpleasant lady who is a shade too ambitious—will start a new trend in unpleasant females. This is probably to be welcomed. But it's to be hoped that they will be a shade more convincing. . . .

Evelyn Payne's HELD OPEN FOR DEATH (Arcadia, $2.75) could be dismissed as a pleasant novel of murder in the South West, but this would not be fair. If you are interested in complicated people, in contrived people, in the kind of people you will probably never meet, you shouldn't really read Arcadia novels. They'll bore you. But if, on the other hand, you realize that murder *can* strike around the corner from you, or "up on the Hill" in small towns, you'll find these novels pleasant, in addition to their being, perhaps unconsciously, portraits of a way of life we in New York, Chicago or Los Angeles sometimes forget exists. Evelyn Payne's novel, describing Tillie Lattner's brush with death, is, likewise, pleasant and relaxing.

charles, nicknamed stinky

by . . . Polly S. MacManus

What are they like, these youngsters who all look the same in their black satin jackets and tight blue jeans!

WE TALK a lot about teenagers. We don't do much for them. Take the case of the "gardenia girl." Remember her? I was all mixed up in the start of that case, but I sort of slid out from under it when I got the chance. The "gardenia girl" was young—about sixteen. She was beautiful, dark curly hair, big black eyes, gardenia petal skin. She was murdered.

A guy who punched a typewriter for a living found her in a dark spot back of the Star Building. I am that guy—my name is Hugh Semmes.

Everyone knows the Star Building. It's located on the main drag through the big town. This boulevard crosses a street that leads down to the lake. My friend, Jim Halliday, has a cute little boat docked a bit farther north. His daughter, Sara, she seems like my own child, had taken me out for a run that night. Mike Popov ran the motor—he is Sara's beau. Since they are bent upon marriage, I suppose he qualifies as a fiancé. For some reason, Mike and Sara seem to have the idea that I had a lot to do with the happy outcome

As we reported some time ago, our most talented operatives have been unable to find out anything about Cincinnati mystery writer (and MWA member) Polly Simpson MacManus beyond that she inspires awe on the part of non-pros who read what she writes and just know *that Miss MacManus has lived.*

of their troubles. One time when they got innocently mixed up with an unpleasant bunch. Silly kids—these two. Anyhow, they took me around with them quite a lot.

On the night that I found the "gardenia girl," we three had been out on the lake. I got a headache and asked that they bring me in to shore. Jim Halliday was out in California at the time. My apartment is on the "near north" not far from the Star—I went around that building in order to save time. The presses were hitting it off at a great rate. I told myself that it was the most exciting sound in the world with the possible exception of *Dixie* and *Onward Christian Soldiers*. I crossed that paved bit in the back, where the big wagons came in to unload paper, or load on papers. The spot was deserted and perfectly black dark. That's how I happened to stumble over something that lay directly in my path.

As I went down, my hand came in contact with something soft and about half warm. It was a young human cheek. I had tripped over the body of a girl. She was rolled up in a little bundle at my feet. As I righted myself I could half see her. I took out my pencil flashlight and turned it on her face. There was an inch-wide silk band about her throat. Her mouth was open; her tongue protruding. Her eyes were not closed, but they were sightless and bulging. My hands were shaking as I put my flash close beside her, took out my pocket knife to cut the knot about the girl's throat. It wasn't easy. The material had some sort of metal thread woven into it. The way she lay, it seemed that whoever had committed the crime, thrust the girl face down into the mire of the court, holding her firmly with a knee between her shoulders while the knot was being tied. There was a dark mark on her white blouse, to prove this theory. I felt uneasy as I looked down at the poor little disfigured thing. In her agony she had jerked her face out of the mire. It was turned up toward me in all its horror.

Bits of white mist were drifting in from the lake. A fog horn hooted, out there on the water. The presses inside of the building continued to rumble. No other human came into the little court. There was no relaxing of the truly hideous position of the body, after the cord was cut. My hand slid down to the girl's wrist. No pulse. No mist of breath on the pocket mirror that I held to her mouth. There is no telling what anyone else might have done under the circumstances. I yelled. Then I stepped out of sight around the corner of the building.

After a moment they were all there, all those people who seem to rise up out of the ground, when there is any sort of an accident. Someone ran out of the Star

Building and someone went to call the police. I mingled with the crowd, not a very gallant attitude, perhaps. Again I say, what would you do? My evidence wouldn't help the poor little thing at my feet. I was right in the midst of writing a murder story. I couldn't give the time to one in real life.

To my surprise I saw Sara and Mike in the crowd. They did not look my way, being too intent upon the person walking between them. He was a good looking young man, his face vaguely familiar. It wasn't until the trio was very close that I realized that this guy's picture had been in the daily press not two weeks past. He was Gene DeLasky, "chief" of the Yellow Tigers, one of those "super teen-age groups," as they are called by themselves. It surprised me to discover that the two young people that I knew best were on friendly terms with any of those frightening gang leaders. It looked as if he was a friend of long standing. He had thrust his arm through Sara's, holding her hand in his, arm and hand clutched to his side. Mike walking at Sara's right did not seem to notice what was going on. He was talking to another guy who was wearing the same sort of jacket as DeLasky, black satin trimmed in bright yellow.

From across town came the scream of a siren. The police, the police ambulance arrived. Then there were officers questioning everyone at hand. No one knew anything. There had been a cry (mine). The girl was right where she was now. Who had cut the knot? No one knew. Of course I did, but I did not speak; was not questioned. The police medical examiner at his given trade. The police holding back the growing crowd. Then the pretty little girl with the dead white skin had been taken away. The questioning officers were closing their notebooks, when quite by chance one of them noticed Sara and her two young men. He stopped in front of the man on her right.

"You're Gene DeLasky, aren't you?" he asked.

"Sure, want to make something of it?"

"Don't get smart, DeLasky. You knew this dead girl, didn't you?"

"I've seen her around. She wasn't my girl and I didn't kill her, if that's what you want to know."

"That so? We'll find out."

To my surprise Mike stepped up. "He couldn't have killed her, officer. He's been out on the lake with us all evening."

"Who's us? . . . and are you one of his gang?"

It was a lie Mike had told, but the first thing I knew, I found myself swearing that the little punk was with me all evening. Sara had caught sight of me in the crowd and joyfully produced me

as the fourth in the party. I gave my name, address, business, etc.

"Sure, I know your stuff, read it once in the *Star.*" The way the policeman spoke of my books didn't classify him as one of my fans.

The officer turned to the boy who had been walking beside Mike, on the way up from the lake. After I was in bed that night and was thinking it over, it struck me that he was an emotional looking guy—tall, slim, dark eyes and dark curly hair. DeLasky addressed him as Stinky. The title didn't seem to suit his theatrical appearance. I remember he gave his name as John Smith and stuck to it. There was no charge upon which he could be held.

I had been a fool to let myself get mixed up with boys like the "Yellow Tigers." I had actually lied to alibi them and what was more they knew I had lied. I was getting too old to go chasing after teen-agers, regardless of the fact that Sara had put me in this tiresome position.

The telephone rang. I picked it up from my bedside table.

"Hello." It was she, Sara, her voice trembling.

"Uncle Hugh, I'm in trouble. Can you come and get me?"

"Where are you?" She couldn't have gotten clear out to the place her father called, the farm.

I glanced at the illumined dial of my wall clock. Less than an hour since I saw her walk toward Mike's car with the three young men. I hated to see her go, but, after all, who was I.

I might feel that she was my child because, after her mother died I had helped Jim to bring her up. Actually, we were not related. Now she was in trouble, appealing to me for help.

"I'm at the Hideaway," she answered, in a whisper. The Hideaway was one of the less savory spots on the near north.

"Is Mike there?"

"No, I don't know where he is."

"DeLasky?"

"No."

If Sara was in that sort of place at such an hour of the night, alone and frightened, it was no time for conversation.

"Wait for me right where you are, Sara. If the phone booth is near the door, fine, if not go to the door right away."

I was in my clothes and tearing down the front steps of my apartment building in two minutes flat. The fact that Sara had been able to make a telephone call comforted me. She was not held anywhere against her will.

It was gray and misty outside, raining just a little. I ran toward the boulevard. There were always people there regardless of the hour. I'd grab a taxi! No, that would be silly. The spot I was headed for was not too far, only I was going the wrong way. The Hideaway was on Clark. Walking

fast, running a bit, walking fast again. It was better than to trust a taxi to fight the lights.

The Hideaway was a small night club, a bar in front, a piano on a raised platform. There was a lazy looking man, with a cigarette hanging out of the corner of his mouth, playing whatever the customers requested.

What in the name of goodness was Sara doing in a honky-tonk place like this? What was Mike thinking about to take her to such a place? Where was he when she called? Why did they follow me up from the lake? Where did they pick up the two young squares they had with them? They didn't know the "gardenia girl," or did they?

I went into the club at a dog trot. It looked very peaceful, a couple of men at the end of the bar drinking beer, a few occupied tables, the man at the piano—no Sara. I felt silly saying what I had to say. I stopped at the bar.

"A girl called me up from here."

"I didn't see no girl; don't know nothing about her," the barkeeper answered.

"She said she was calling from here, asked me to come for her. I have. She's the daughter of a friend of mine." I did feel a fool. "She's quite young."

The bartender looked at me smilingly, "You feeling okay, mister? You know we don't serve minors."

"Where's your telephone?"

"Right over there."

A single booth in the front of the place, empty! I wanted to grab the man by the neckband of his shirt and shake the truth out of him. He guessed what I was thinking because he backed up.

"Now, keep your temper! The little lady wasn't here."

I started toward the door. "I cannot search this joint, but the police can!"

"Wait a minute! We don't want trouble. I'll call the boss." I stopped as the bartender went to a door at the side of the bar. He said quietly, "Mr. DeLasky, will you come out please?"

Then I was scared.

There was a resemblance between the DeLaskys, father and son. I was sure of the relationship. The only difference lay in the fact that the man I was facing was older and slicker. He came around the end of the bar smilingly.

"Won't you just come into my office, Mr. Semmes?"

He knew me! I was surprised and my face must have indicated it. Gene's father laughed.

"Come now, Mr. Semmes. You are too modest. Everyone knows you are a mystery writer and a darned good one. Why, I've often said—if I could think up the things you do—"

I interrupted, "I've often said I only hoped I wasn't giving the boys any ideas. It seems I did that. I'm going for the police."

"As you like. It's too bad to spoil the kids' fun. This whole thing was a joke on you. Of course if you can't take it, call the police!"

"Was the death of a fifteen-year-old girl back of the Star Building also a joke?"

"I heard about that, too bad, but what has my son got to do with Joan Esmirald's death?"

A glass back of the bar shattered on the floor. The phone rang in DeLasky's office. Without apology he left me and went inside his office, closing the door. I didn't know what to do. Sara had been frightened when she talked to me. She had said to come to this place. She didn't seem to be here now. My eyes wandered about. The few people had not heard DeLasky's soft voice, his manner to me had been cordial. The barkeep was at the far end of the bar. He had been down under, apparently cleaning up the broken glass. Now he was scribbling on an order blank. I walked toward him and to my surprise he at once walked toward me, stopped across from where I stood and without looking at me he began to make sweeping gestures as if to clean the ledge with the towel he held in his hand. As he did this, something concealed in the cloth fell out and landed almost at my feet. It was the piece of paper he had been scribbling on. Now it was folded into a square, and written in big letters across it was a single word SARA.

The beer drinkers at the far end of the bar were not looking nor were the few others listening to the pianist. I stooped, quickly picked up the paper, crumbled it into a ball and stuck it into my pocket as I made for the door. For some reason which I actually didn't understand myself, I walked as far as the boulevard before I looked inside the folded paper. There was a single line of writing. It said, "Go to 25 East Maple Street, 3rd floor front—left-hand side." Below this was printed in caps, DON'T CALL POLICE IF YOU WANT HER.

The bell on the Cathedral half way down Rush rang three. I had a choice, either to go to the police at once and tell them the whole story or to follow directions. After a moment's hesitation, I turned north as far as Maple and backtracked from Clark.

Twenty-five was a big red building, six stories high. It was the sort of place that was a product of the turn of the century. In the front hall, a bank of mail boxes was topped by a realtor's sign. It told me that the front apartment right, third floor, was for rent; was now empty and open for inspection. I felt sick. I had been duped. Heaven only knew where Sara was now. The short time that it had taken me to come to this spot might be just enough for her captors to take her. Where? Why? I turned to go out of the door, stopped.

The lock on the middle door was broken. That was all to the good. I could not take a chance on ringing any bells. If Sara was in this house, she was being held against her will. Whoever it was must not know there was help at hand, so I was careful not to slam the door. Once in the front hall, I slipped off my shoes and placed them close to the end of the bottom step. Then I took the stair as fast as I could without making noise. As I went up the last flight I could hear a muffled sound. I slid over to the door of the supposedly empty apartment and put my ear to the door. They were not trying to keep their voices low and there were a lot of young men in the place. It was hard to get more than a word now and then.

I heard someone say, " 'Gardenia girl' they call her, some name for that doll!" Then after a moment another one said, "Why not tell us if he did it. We ought to know." There was a loud laugh and the answer came back. "Sure he did it. He thinks we have sense enough to know without being told." "What's Stinky got to say about the murder? He was burning a short fuse on that doll, Sara." Stinky! That must be that tall guy who was walking with Mike and Gene DeLasky and Sara.

The voice died away as I heard a sneering one saying, "Wonder what Mr. DeLasky thinks about . . ." The voices were muffled again. Then I heard the name "Sara," clearly and distinctly.

I'll never know what happened next. I was eager to know what they were going to say about Sara. Perhaps I leaned too heavily against the door. Possibly I made a slight sound. The lock on the door may have been broken. Anyway, under the pressure of my body, it flew open. I found myself inside. There was a complete wall of young faces about me. It was like being in the Roman Arena, the target, the sport of them all.

The room, in fact the whole apartment was empty of furniture. In what must have been the living room, there were fifteen to twenty young men, boys of sixteen or seventeen. They were dressed so much alike it appeared as if they were in uniform, white "T" shirts under their black satin Eisenhower jackets, blue jeans that rested far down on their hip bones, held up by the fact that they were as tight as jodhpurs.

For an instant after I was catapulted into the room, everything was quite silent. Then someone called out, "We got company."

Then they all seemed to move slowly toward me. I remembered the stories I had heard of groups of young hoodlums, kicking and beating a person to death for the sheer joy of seeing him suffer. I braced myself for the onslaught, while my eyes traveled around the circle.

"Cut it out, fellows." The quiet

voice was young DeLasky's. He came in through a swinging door in the back of the room. There was no question who was the boss, once he was there. The boys advancing toward me stopped in their tracks and made a path for him.

"I don't know how you happened to get here," he told me. "Most times I'd find out if I had to pull out your fingernails." He paused for emphasis and I just looked at him. At the moment he looked very much the bad child trying to frighten a companion with the thought of torture.

I didn't reply. He glanced carelessly about the room. "You guys take a powder. I got something I want to say to my friend here. Hi, Stinky, you wait—" I had not seen the second fellow wearing the yellow Tiger jacket, who had been with Sara.

He came out of the crowd. There was a low murmur of dissent. Gene DeLasky said, "Brat! You'll have your fun." There was something about the way he said that word, fun, that made me sick.

The others drifted out through the swinging door. When the last one had gone, DeLasky faced me. He spoke in a low tone of voice. "You won't be surprised if I tell you that Sara is in this house and she is in great danger unless you do just as you are told."

I didn't reply and after a moment Gene snarled, "If that's the way you want it, okay, but don't get too cute if you ever want to see Sara again."

Suddenly I felt very old and tired. There was no way for me to get Sara out of this horror except to obey this young monster.

"What do you want me to do?" I questioned.

The answer was the last thing in the world I expected. "We wants you should write a who-done-it for us."

I laughed. The whole thing had been out of hand. Now it was simply silly.

"You don't think we mean it, do you?" This from Stinky.

Gene DeLasky said, "Man, I'll level with you. We saw you find Joanie's body. We . . . we just happened to be around there. We heard you yell but we didn't hear you telling the police nothing about it."

After a moment when I did not answer, Stinky spoke. "Okay, Mister, you keep your mouth shut. You're going to take a little trip with me." He started across the room, stopped at the door, his hand on the knob. "Maybe you have some bright idea about attracting the attention of the other tenants in this building. Well, yell all you want to yell. They all know we're here. They won't come to the door. They must have heard us bringing Mike in here. He was yelling

plenty. The other tenants didn't do a thing to help him."

We two went out of the front door and silently down the stairs. At the bottom step, he kicked at my shoes parked by the newel post.

"Yours?"

"Yes."

"Better put them on. The boys'll take them off if they want your feet to be bare."

If they wanted my feet to be bare. For what? The palms of my hands were wet.

There was a narrow staircase leading down from the big front hall.

The whole place smelled like a combination of coal dust and dirty scrub water, more so as we went down into the cellar. I stumbled as we reached the last step down. Wherever we were it was black dark. It was absolutely without a ray of light. The boy took something out of his pocket and pressed it into my hand, a flashlight.

"We're in the hall downstairs," he told me. "There's a door with a glass top panel at the end. I want you to walk down the hall to this door, turn on your flashlight when you get there, take a squint and come right back and—hi, listen." He put his hand hard on my shoulder. "No funny business like breaking that window. Remember, we still got Sara. When you look through that window you'll see what we can do to people."

It was like stepping off into a black hole. I felt I was losing my balance, put out my hands and touched the walls on each side. I wondered if in making me go alone, the little punk was trying to break down my morale.

"You must be there now," he called out. "One flash and then you come back."

As if in answer, the toe of my shoe struck the wall at the end of the hall. I almost fell as I pushed the slide on the flashlight. I was standing against a door, the top of which was glass. Looking through this glass I saw a filthy room crowded with broken old furniture, piles of papers, stacks of magazines. In the center of the room was Mike, a battered Mike, his face a bloody pulp. His shirt was torn and his back crisscrossed with swelling purplish marks. He turned a little at the light. The voice from the end of the hall called out. "The boys got a little overenthusiastic. He didn't want us to take his girl away from him. They'll do the same with you."

As I started back down the hall, I said, "Now about this who-done-it you want me to write for you. You must know I won't write one word till Sara . . ."

"We got it all figured out. You an' Sara an' Mike an' Gene an' me, we'll all go over to your place where it's nice and quiet

an' you can write our who-done-it. Come on now, we'll meet the rest of them by the front door." He touched me on the shoulder. "Jus' like I said before, don't try any funny business like yell'n for the police. Sara, she's okay now, but if you get cute it won't be so healthy for her."

When I saw Sara, white face and frightened, she was walking close to the bloody mess who was Mike. I tried to muster a smile.

"It's all right, baby," I told her.

We all piled into a big black convertible that was parked outside. Mike and Sara and I sat in the back seat, the boys up front. Sara was crying.

"Oh Uncle Hugh! Uncle Hugh! It's all my fault. Just after you got out of the boat, we hadn't even started the engines when Gene came along. He said . . ." She wasn't trying to keep her voice down. I glanced at Gene sitting up beside Stinky, who was driving. They didn't move a muscle. They were going to permit her to say anything she wished to tell me. It didn't figure. "Gene said he wanted us to come up to his dad's restaurant. You know, The Hideaway. I suppose I was feeling rather smarty."

I said, "How did you meet these guys, Sara?" It was in the nature of a test. If they let us say what we wished or not.

Stinky half turned about in his seat. "Sara is always for the under-dog. She met us at a Reform-Em Party at the 'Y.' " He laughed. Sara started talking again, but not about the "Y."

"First thing I knew, Uncle Hugh, I was alone. I got frightened and called you. Before you got there Gene and Stinky came and told me that Mike was waiting for me." She began to cry again. "I thought we were just having fun."

When we pulled up in front of my apartment building we all got out very quietly and went inside. A revolver in one's side tends to make one quiet. That was the position in which Sara and I found ourselves. Mike didn't know where he was most of the time.

It was growing lighter outside, the pale-gray light before sunrise. We went upstairs and I pulled out my keys and opened the door.

"Put Mike on my bed," I told them, "it's open." Now that I was in my own apartment I felt myself master of the situation. I was still puzzled by the willingness of Gene and Stinky to let us talk.

I noticed that they never left us alone for a moment. Once Mike was settled I went back into my living room where Sara was huddled in the corner of the davenport in front of the fire and the two young men standing quite at ease near the door. They both had their right hand resting

lightly on something inside their coats on the left hand side. I could guess what.

"Gentlemen," I said, "you have asked me for a mystery story as the price of peace. Now even the outline of such a story would take several hours, if I had the plot in mind, which I do not."

"You don't have to have a plot, Mr. Semmes," drawled Gene. "We'll give you that."

I pulled out my typewriter and I sat down in front of it. As I dropped my hands on the keys I noticed the fingers were trembling. This struck me as strange, since up to now, my mind had nothing to fear. Why should my hands know.

"Well?" I questioned.

Stinky moved around back of Sara and stood leaning on the top of the davenport. I said, "I have a guest room of sorts in the back of the apartment. Sara looks worn out." I glanced at Gene DeLasky, "You must know that you have us where you want us. If you will permit her to lie down back there—I can assure you that there is no fire escape outside that window, or other means for her to escape."

Gene said, "Sure, that's okay. Could you make us some coffee first, Sara? Man, I could use some."

"I'll make it if I can risk an eye on Mike first. Okay, Uncle Hugh?"

I nodded and Gene said, "Sure baby—hi, wait a moment. Most likely there's a kitchen door. You go along with her, Stinky."

I heard Sara say to her guard, as they left the room, "What's your real name? I hate that nickname."

The boy answered, "Charles. The guys call me Stinky for kicks. I hate it."

Gene DeLasky came slowly toward me, sat on the arm of the chair, the gun dangling from his hand.

"Now I got a good plot in mind. Make it first person like you usually do. Just an outline. You can make it longer later on if you like." There was something queer about the way he said those last three words. It sounded as if he had a good joke on me. Or was I just thinking things that were not true. The whole situation was queer. I glanced about my quiet living room. Sara was making coffee in the kitchenette. I could hear her voice. Mike must be all right, and Charles, nicknamed Stinky, was behaving himself.

"Okay, go ahead with your plot," I said.

"The heroine's name is Joanne Esmirald, known as the 'gardenia girl' because of her beautiful white skin."

"You'll never get away with using her name, especially if this is her story."

"I'm giving you the plot, keep on going."

"Okay."

"An older man, a writer, falls in love with her and when she turns him down flat because of a younger guy, he strangles her." Gene grinned, "You could do a nice piece of writing there if you just had time. The old fellow strangling her back of the Newspaper office, her screams drowned by the sound of the presses. Go on writing, Mr. Semmes, I still got the gun on you! This man gets two young friends of his to come to his apartment and when he finds that they are going to betray him he shoots them and then himself."

There was a sudden thump on the back door. Gene started.

I said, "Relax, it's the paper."

After a moment Stinky came in with it in his hand.

Gene was across the room in a flash. "We make the first page?" he asked childishly. Then realizing that his gun was hanging uselessly at his side, he whirled and pointed it at me.

Stinky said, "Sure, with her picture an' everything—an' say, they just pulled her father out of the river!"

Something clicked in my mind. I remembered a crash of glass splintered on the floor back of a bar. "Was he the bartender at your father's place, The Hideaway?" Of course I was looking at Gene.

"Sure he was. Now he's dead. It looks like he wasn't too bright."

Sara came in at that moment with the coffee tray. She put it down on a small table and began to pour out the steaming brown liquid. She did not speak.

"They say they are rounding up the gang," muttered Stinky.

Gene said, "Mr. Semmes—" There was something frightening about the stiff polite way he addressed me—much worse than jive talk. "Mr. Semmes, I suppose that now that you have killed the girl you love, dying yourself will not be too hard?"

Sara raised her head. "But that's silly! Uncle Hugh didn't love Joannie—and he didn't kill her." Sara was too intent upon her subject to pay any attention to the blazing hate in Gene's eyes. "I heard some of the boys talking. You killed Joannie, Gene, because she was tired of you."

Gene's voice was soft and queer, as he answered. "Now take it easy, Babe, or you'll be through with all this sooner than you think."

Stinky crossed quickly to where Sara was standing and placed himself in front of her.

I sat with my hands clasped in my lap. The whole plot was clear to me. I understood why Gene was willing to let us say anything at all to each other. It was because we were all going to die.

When found, my body would have a confession of murder and suicide on it. I was not surprised when I heard Gene say, "Write as I dictate, Mr. Semmes, 'Sara and Mike were going to expose me to the police. Of course I had to shoot them. I am sorry for this. Now I am going to kill myself.' "

A long while ago a crack-pot threatened to kill me because of something I had written. At that time I got a gun and put it into the drawer of my typewriter table. If only Gene's attention could be distracted for half a moment—

He was speaking again. "Sign the outline, Mr. Semmes. Thank you and good-bye." He raised the gun and leveled it at me.

There was a crash and the lights went off all over the apartment. In the pale dawn light I saw Stinky push Sara toward me with the whispered command, "Duck, Sister."

Sara ducked, but not before the cup of coffee that she had in her hand went straight into Gene's eyes. His two hands went up to his face and his gun dropped to the floor. For some reason —perhaps it was Sara—Stinky didn't use his.

I don't know when, in all this confusion, I dove into my typewriter table drawer and pulled out my gun.

I said, "Put up your hands fellows! I have you two covered."

Then the lights came on again. I saw Mike at the door of my bedroom. His finger was on the light switch, the table he had knocked over on purpose to make a noise, was in front of him. It was a battered Mike, but a Mike on the comeback. The two guys near the door had their hands over their heads.

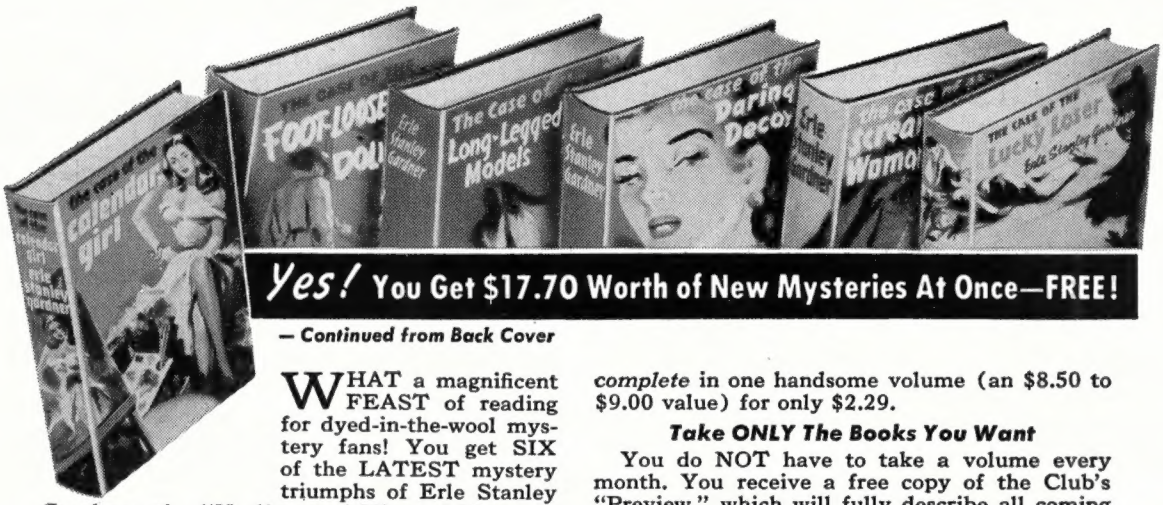
Jim Halliday, Sara's father, you know, grabbed the first plane out and came home, after I talked to him long distance. He and I walked up to my apartment together the day that the trial of Gene and Stinky ended with a hung jury.

"It's all over but it's still going on," I told Jim. "Another jury will be the same. It's like all of the rest of the teen-age stuff. Have some coffee, Jim?"

He followed me into my kitchenette. I pulled out my coffee pot and I laughed. "Sara sure splashed Gene DeLasky with coffee at the right moment. Thank God it was just lukewarm."

Jim nodded. "And thank God that in spite of what people say, there aren't too many Gene DeLaskys."

"And a lot of right guys who just have their meanness on the outside. Like the one named Charles, who was nicknamed Stinky."


The Case of the Calendar Girl
FOOT-LOOSE DOLL
Erle Stanley Gardner
The Case of the Long-Legged Models
Erle Stanley Gardner
The Case of the Daring Decoy
Erle Stanley Gardner
The Case of the Screaming Woman
Erle Stanley Gardner
THE CASE OF THE Lucky Loser
Erle Stanley Gardner

Yes! You Get $17.70 Worth of New Mysteries At Once—FREE!

— Continued from Back Cover

WHAT a magnificent FEAST of reading for dyed-in-the-wool mystery fans! You get SIX of the LATEST mystery triumphs of Erle Stanley Gardner, the "Undisputed King of Mystery Writers"! Each is a *full-size, full-length* book, absolutely complete. A $17.70 value — but yours FREE on this sensational offer!

Why do we make such a liberal offer? Simply to introduce you to the many advantages of membership in The Detective Book Club — the only Club that brings you the very latest NEW mysteries *at one third the usual cost!*

The Cream of the New Mysteries for LESS than 80¢ Each!

Out of the 300 or more new detective books that come out every year, the Club selects the very "cream of the crop" by top-notch authors like Erle Stanley Gardner, Agatha Christie, Manning Coles, Mignon Eberhart, Anthony Gilbert, and Leslie Ford. ALL THESE, and many *other* famous authors have had their books selected by the Club. Many are members of the Club themselves!

Club selections are ALL newly published books. As a member, you get THREE of them *complete* in one handsome volume (an $8.50 to $9.00 value) for only $2.29.

Take ONLY The Books You Want

You do NOT have to take a volume every month. You receive a free copy of the Club's "Preview," which will fully describe all coming selections and you may reject any volume before or after you receive it. You need NOT take any specific number of books — only the ones you want. NO money in advance; NO membership fees. You may cancel membership any time you please.

You Enjoy These Five Advantages

(1) You get the cream of the finest BRAND-NEW detective books—by the best authors. (2) You save as much as $6 to $7 off the usual cost. (3) You take ONLY the books you want. (4) The volumes are fresh and clean — delivered right to your door. (5) They are so well printed and bound that they grow into a library you'll be proud to own.

Mail Postcard for Six FREE Books

SEND NO MONEY. Simply mail postcard promptly, and we will send you at once — FREE — the six complete Perry Mason mystery thrillers described on other side, together with the current triple-volume containing three other complete new detective books.

THE DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB, Roslyn, L.I., New York

MAIL THIS POSTCARD NOW FOR YOUR SIX FREE BOOKS

●

NO POSTAGE NEEDED

ALL SIX BOOKS FREE **SEND NO MONEY — JUST MAIL THIS CARD**

65

THE DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB QL
Roslyn, L. I., New York

Please enroll me as a member and send me FREE, in regular publisher's editions, the SIX new full-length Perry Mason mystery novels pictured on this page. In addition send me the current triple-volume, which contains three complete detective books.

I am not obligated to take any specific number of volumes. I am to receive an advance description of all forthcoming selections and I may reject any book before or after I receive it. I may cancel membership whenever I wish.

I need send no money now, but for each volume I decide to keep I will send you only $2.29 plus a few cents mailing charge as complete payment within one week after I receive it. (*Books shipped in U. S. A. only.*)

Mr. }
Mrs. } .....
Miss }
(PLEASE PRINT PLAINLY)

Address.....

Zone No.
City.....(if any)....State.....

FREE ALL 6 OF THESE TOP *Perry Mason* MYSTERIES

TO NEW MEMBERS

by The World's No. 1 Mystery Writer

ERLE STANLEY GARDNER

6 Full-Size Hard-Bound Books • A $17.70 Value

Yes! You get ALL SIX of these suspense-packed Perry Mason mysteries — a $17.70 value — FREE on this amazing offer. Read simple details on other side; then rush postcard for six FREE books.

The case of the calendar girl
Erle Stanley Gardner
THE CASE OF THE FOOT-LOOSE DOLL
Erle Stanley Gardner
The Case of the Long-Legged Models
the case of the Screaming Woman
THE CASE OF THE Lucky Loser
Erle Stanley Gardner
the case of the Daring Decoy
Erle Stanley Gardner

All Six of these Exciting New Perry Mason Mysteries FREE!

1 The Case of the CALENDAR GIRL

Perry's cooked his own goose this time! He's just proven to the D.A. that Dawn Manning is a murderess—and now she wants HIM to be HER lawyer!

2 The Case of the FOOT-LOOSE DOLL

The maddest murder mix-up of Perry Mason's career — in which Perry finds himself defending a girl who may be guilty of — HER OWN MURDER!

3 The Case of the LONG-LEGGED MODELS

PERRY's client admits she has the motive for murder and a gun *with one shell missing*. She also knows *something* that could save her neck — but she WON'T admit WHAT!

4 The Case of the DARING DECOY

Perry Mason's client says he's being FRAMED on a murder charge. He insists a girl named Rosalind can clear him. But Perry finds her MURDERED.

5 The Case of the SCREAMING WOMAN

The D. A. produces a tape recording of the murdered man's last words — naming Kirby as the killer! How can Mason prove he ISN'T GUILTY?

6 The Case of the LUCKY LOSER

Everybody is convinced Perry's client is GUILTY — even the client! All Perry has to prove he's innocent is — a CORPSE that has been dead for 2 YEARS!

Postage Will be Paid by Addressee

No Postage Stamp Necessary If Mailed in the United States

BUSINESS REPLY MAIL
First-Class Permit No. 47—Sec. 34.9—P. L. & R.—Roslyn, N.Y.

The Detective Book Club
Roslyn, L. I.
New York

SEE OTHER SIDE